

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

Series Overview

Lent is popularly known as a season for individual self-examination, penitence, and “giving something up” as a spiritual discipline. It seems to be primarily inwardly and negatively focused. It’s commonly seen as being about what’s wrong with me as an individual and what I’m willing to do to improve myself.

While self-examination and some individual work are part of the work of Lent, the early church developed Lent to be primarily “other-focused.” Lent was created as the final leg of intense preparation and support for people who had chosen to learn to live the way of Jesus. It was, we might say, a kind of finishing school for those preparing for baptism and lifelong Christian discipleship.

The church in the West had begun to drift from such a clear formational focus for this season by the Middle Ages. From that point forward, essentially until Vatican II, Lent in the Western Church, whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Anglican, had taken on a more “generically penitential” hue. The still-popular impression of Lent as an extended season of “navel-gazing,” self-deprivation, and generally feeling bad about oneself was not all that far off-track from what Lent had become in practice.

That changed with the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, many of which were then also carried out by Protestants and Anglicans worldwide. The early Christian approach to Lent as a season of intentional formation and baptismal preparation has been moved front and center again. The readings for Lent every year in both the Roman Catholic Readings for the Mass (1969, 1981) and the Revised Common Lectionary (1992) were chosen to support that work. So has the language of our own version of the baptismal covenant.

Each week during Year A, the readings correspond to a section of our baptismal vows. Worship each week becomes an occasion to celebrate and contemplate what it means to live out one or more of these vows.

Worship alone does not and cannot fulfill the formational purposes of Lent. So throughout this series, we are also providing guidance for two additional formational opportunities: formation groups and Courageous Conversation events.

Formation groups are small groups (7-12 people) that may meet in homes or other places to help one another grow into living the baptismal calling by praying together, deepening their understanding of the vows, reporting their progress on living them, and encouraging and supporting one another to live them better.

Courageous Conversation events are an opportunity to help a larger number of people from the congregation engage in learning about and deepening the congregation’s ministry with people who are often marginalized: prisoners, homeless people, immigrants, or soldiers. These Courageous Conversations may be held as a Sunday

morning formation option or as part of a Lenten Series, perhaps with a light, simple meal opened to the wider community.

Our colleague, Scott Hughes, has provided outlines and guidance for five larger-group sessions for each of these situations of marginalization. Take some time to discern in your formation, outreach, and leadership teams which of these four groups of people may present the greatest opportunity for new or deepened ministry in your particular context, and use Scott's materials to help you organize the series of Courageous Conversations that will help your congregation maximize its potential for growth in ministry with these individuals.

May these resources for worship, formation, learning, and ministry help you and your congregation have a vivifying Lent.

Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 1 Ash Wednesday: Remember, You Are Dust

We gather to acknowledge our mortality and our sinfulness, and to seek God's mercy and guidance for the season of intensive formation and re-formation in the way of Jesus that lies ahead.

March 5 Lent 1: Renounce

We walk the way of temptation with Jesus and learn from him what it means to continue to renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin.

March 12 Lent 2: Accept

Through powerful image of new birth and the biblical story of the serpent in the wilderness, Jesus shows Nicodemus and us what it takes for us to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

March 19 Lent 3: Confess

In an encounter with a woman at a well in Samaria, Jesus confesses he is the Messiah, and she not only embraces this, but leads others to make the same confession.

March 26 Lent 4: Nurture

The response of the crowds to Jesus' healing of a man born blind says much about how our congregation can actively "nurture one another in the Christian faith and life, and include these persons now before you in your care," or fail to do so.

April 2 Lent 5: Believe!

The faith we confess, and the faith that transforms us, is more than intellectual assent to a theological construct. It is to stake our lives on the Triune God, and so join Martha's confession, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into this world."

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

Ash Wednesday

FULL SERVICE

ENTRANCE

The worship space should be fairly dark, illuminated only by candles (perhaps several banks of votive candles placed around the worship space) and the light on a projection screen, wall or scrim. Use these or similar words, projected in a loop on a screen.

Prepare

Reconcile

Repent

Mercy

Mortality

Know Yourself

Prayer

Fasting

Deny Yourself

Read Scripture

Listen

Silence

Dust

Ashes

Kneel . . . Now

If you do not have projection capability, place the words on posters or banners and place them

around the worship space.

Have an usher stationed, along with signs posted, encouraging people to enter in silence. If using posters or banners, the usher may invite people to walk through the stations before taking their seats.

Consider playing Gungor's "[Beautiful Things](#)" (CCLI #5665521) in the background as the [video of the words](#) plays or as the people move from station to station. (If you use a recording, be sure you have the licensing to cover this use).

As people take their seats, they may kneel if they are able.

Invitation to Lenten Discipline

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

the early Christians observed with great devotion

the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection,

and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration

there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season, converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism.

It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins

and had separated themselves from the community of faith

were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness,

and restored to participation in the life of the Church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded

of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ

and the need we all have to renew our faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church,

to observe a holy Lent:

by self-examination and repentance;

by prayer, fasting, and self-denial;

and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.

To make a right beginning of repentance,

and as a mark of our mortal nature,

let us now kneel (bow) before our Creator and Redeemer.

SCRIPTURE AND RESPONSE

Instrumentalists continue playing the song softly while a reader reads.

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Do NOT project the words of this text. Let the focus be on the reader and on listening to the text. Let the screen keep the background (but not the words) of the opening loop. When the reader finishes, the instrumentalists finish the verse they are playing, then invite the assembly to sing.

“O-So-So”

TFWS 2232, Stanza 2 or

“Dust and Ashes”

W&S 3098, Stanza 2

Still kneeling; words on the screen.

Again, instrumentalists continue playing while a reader reads.

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

The screen returns to the background as before. The reader finishes; the instrumentalists finish the verse; then cue the congregation to stand and sing.

*“O-So-So”

TFWS 2232, Stanza 3 or

*“Dust and Ashes”

W&S 3098, Stanza 3

While the pastor or deacon or lay leader (if no deacon is present) or lay speaker (if no lay leader is present) brings the gospel to the center of the assembly and reads it . . .

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

All standing as able, instruments still playing the song. If a sermon is offered, the song fades out as the sermon begins, and resumes as the sermon ends.

[Brief Sermon]

*“O-So-So”

TFWS 2232, Stanza 4 or

“Dust and Ashes”

W&S 3098, Refrain (2X)

The assembly sings as the reader of the gospel returns to the front and the pastor lifts the container holding the ashes. At the words "reconcile your people" in verse 4 of "O-So-So" or "lead us through the desert sands" in "Dust and Ashes," refrain (second time), the pastor blesses the ashes with the sign of the cross (no words are needed).

Receiving the Ashes

As the song concludes, the pastor gestures in silence for the people to come to receive the ashes. This should be done in a deliberate, unhurried way. Give each person ample time to kneel or bow to receive. Offer one station per 35-50 people, and plan for 10 seconds per

person. The action is offered in silence, with the words, "Remember, you are dust" and "Repent, believe the gospel," alternating on the projection screen, scrim, or wall.

As the ashes are received, a soloist with soft piano or guitar accompaniment sings.

Solo: "God, How Can We Forgive" TFWS 2169 or
Solo: "Falling on My Knees" W&S 3099

A soloist with ensemble/congregational response (for those in line or having already received), may sing.

Solo/Congregation "Forgive Us, Lord/Perdón Señor" TFWS 2134 or
"Depth of Mercy" W&S 3097

Instrumental music from this and other appropriate songs focused on repentance, confession, and forgiveness (but NOT the cross! Lent is not Holy Week!) may continue until all have received and returned to their places. Then all sing.

All: "Sunday's Palms Are Wednesday's Ashes" TFWS 2138 or
"Amazing Grace/My Chains are Gone," W&S 3104

Musicians begin segue into TFWS 2157 or W&S 3135.

Declaration of Pardon and Peace

Pastor: In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

People: In Jesus Christ, we all have peace.

Ensemble sings "Come and Fill Our Hearts with Your Peace" (TFWS 2157) or "In God Alone" (W&S 3135) once through, and invites congregation to join as they share Christ's peace with one another, words projected on screen. In the background of the projection, you may wish to project the word "Peace" in other languages -- "Peace," "Shalom," "Eirene," "Salaam," "Shantih," "Ruh," "Paix," "Paz," and whatever other languages may be spoken in the region where you are.

"Come and Fill Our Hearts with Your Peace" TFWS 2157 and/or
"In God Alone" W&S 3135

If this service continues with Holy Communion, follow the guidance beginning here. If not, skip to the end of this resource (Sending Forth without Communion) for suggestions for concluding the service shortly after the Peace.

INTERCESSION, THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Instrumentalists should segue smoothly from "Come and Fill Our Hearts" or "In God Alone" to "Lord, Let Your Kingdom Come" (TFWS 2201) Music may continue playing during the spoken intercessions and time for silent or spoken requests before the leader (deacon, lay leader, lay speaker, or song leader) sings "Lord, in your mercy" or the first half of Chorus 1a of "You Make Beautiful Things," with the second half as congregational response. In keeping with the request of the Council of Bishops, be sure to add an intercession for the earth, as follows, "Together, let us pray for the earth, with thanksgiving for its bounty and for wisdom and strength to care for it and all life upon it."

The people may be standing and invited to join the leader in praying at the "orans" position -- hands raised slightly out to the sides, elbows bent, palms up.

Project on the screen only the words for the song and the theme of each intercession, as follows:

Each other

People who are suffering

Local concerns

World leaders, justice, peace

The earth

The whole church

The communion of saints

**Sung Intercessions: "Lord, Let Your Kingdom Come" (TFWS 2201) or Chorus 1a of "You Make Beautiful Things"*

Instrumentalists segue to the opening of The Great Thanksgiving (TFWS 2257a or other setting).

The Great Thanksgiving (TFWS 2257 or other setting)

The presider (elder or local pastor) leads The Great Thanksgiving using the musical setting and The Great Thanksgiving for Early in Lent from The United Methodist Book of Worship (60-61).

The presider may invite the congregation to continue praying in the orans position. The

congregation uses the musical setting TFWS 2257. These words may appear on screen just before the congregation needs to sing them. Instrumental accompaniment (soft chords related to the setting) may continue through the presider's prayer. You need not include the entire prayer onscreen, just the "people's parts" and the verbal cues for when they begin.

Sharing the Bread and Cup

During the distribution, the congregation and a soloist, using the choir or accompaniment edition, may sing.

Songs during the Distribution

"Taste and See"

TFWS 2267 and/or

"Come to the Table of Grace"

W&S 3168

Once again, plan on at least one station per 35-50 people served, and do not rush. Other instrumental music relating to Holy Communion may be offered from The Faith We Sing or Worship & Song or CCLI. As all are served and the table is re-set, instrumentalists begin segue to "The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve" (TFWS 2241) or "As We Go" (W&S 3183). This plays in the background during the dismissal with blessing.

SENDING FORTH

Dismissal with Blessing

Deacon or Lay Leader or Lay Speaker:

May God, who has forgiven and fed us,
now make us strong for these days ahead.

May Jesus lead us, and we be found faithful to follow.

May the Spirit drive us into the wilderness,
burning away the chaff of our lives,
and purifying our hearts for all to see
and be blessed.

Pastor:

And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Mercy, Master, and Fire,
be with us and remain with us always!

People: Amen!

Song of Sending

“The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve”
 “As We Go”

TFWS 2241 or
 W&S 3183

Deacon, Lay Leader or Lay Speaker:

Go in peace, to love and serve God and your neighbor.

People: Thanks be to God!

OR

SENDING FORTH (WITHOUT COMMUNION)

Instrumentalists segue to "Walk with Me" (TFWS 2242) or "As We Part for the Towns and Cities" (W&S 3180) during the dismissal and Lord's Prayer that follows.

Dismissal with Blessing

Deacon or Lay Leader or Lay Speaker:

May God, who has forgiven us
 now make us strong for these days ahead.
 May Jesus lead us, and we be found faithful to follow.
 May the Spirit drive us into the wilderness,
 burning away the chaff of our lives,
 and purifying our hearts for all to see
 and be blessed.

Pastor:

And may the blessing of God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 Mercy, Master, and Fire,
 Be with us and remain with us always!

People: Amen!

Song of Sending

“Walk with Me”
 “As We Part for the Towns and Cities”

TFWS 2242 or
 W&S 3180

Deacon, Lay Leader or Lay Speaker:

Go in peace, to love and serve God and your neighbor.

People: Thanks be to God.

Depart in silence.

MUSIC NOTES

O-So-So

There are many ways to approach the singing of this haunting, mysterious hymn. Although it can be accompanied on any number of instruments, I would recommend keeping a simple drone (G and D) underneath the melody. This can be accomplished with an organ, choir, strings, or even a “singing bell” technique with [handbells](#). Keep a slow tempo, and allow space between phrases for deep breathing. On the last beat of each line of the text, play finger cymbals one time for some variance in the texture. Using an instrument such as violin or flute on the unison melody can also enhance the ambience. [History of Hymns](#)

Dust and Ashes

An accompaniment for this hymn can be found in the Accompaniment Edition of *Worship & Song*, but my recommendation is similar to “O-So-So” above: the simpler, the better. On this day of reflection and repentance, creating stark textures can be very powerful. Either support with a drone (D and A), or simply sing as an *a cappella* canon as it is printed in the hymnal. If this is the chosen means of singing, know that having a choir (and rehearsing them ahead of time!) is vital to making this work. The other option would be for a solo voice to serve as the leader, and a solo treble instrument such as flute, oboe, or violin, to accompany the congregational singing. A pulsing hand drum might also support rhythmic continuity. [Hymn Study](#)

God, How Can We Forgive

This powerful hymn by [Ruth Duck](#) is beautifully set to the tune LEONI, which is often thought of in relation to the hymn, “The God of Abraham Praise.” It creates a mourning quality that is reflected in the probing questions of the hymn text. For a more traditional setting, accompany on organ or piano. Know, however, that when accompanied simply, this song also works well with a praise band and vocal team. Allow the long phrases of quarter notes to provide the basis to accompany with a driving rhythm. Doing so might provide some atmospheric variance in a service that is so often regarded as quiet and contemplative.

Falling on My Knees

Simple, simple, simple. This is often regarded as a very personal, intimate song; and when receiving the ashes, it can be a powerful expression of repentance and prayer. It is either singable as a solo or a congregational song. The repetition of the text, “So I wait for you” creates a very anticipatory feeling leading into the higher notes of the refrain, and the phrase “I’m falling on my knees” is painted beautifully in the music by singing a descending musical line that itself embodies the action taking place here. Accompany with a piano or solo guitar, and supplement with other instruments if desired.

Forgive Us, Lord/Perdón, Señor

A wonderfully simple accompaniment is provided in the Accompaniment Edition of *The Faith We Sing* for this sung intercessory prayer. If you have a choir in your church, instruct them to sing the congregational words, “Forgive us, Lord/Perdón, Señor,” in four-part harmony. It is possible to allow the congregational parts to serve as a cyclic song that would easily turn into a short statement akin to a breath prayer. A song leader or soloist should sing the intercessions. Treat this song as a true intercessory prayer, and create intercessions that are poignant to your church and community. Accompany with guitar, organ, or piano.

Depth of Mercy

Penny Rodriguez has created one of the most beautiful settings of a Charles Wesley hymn with this tune, GOTTES ZEIT. Though there are no actual words of conversation, the unspoken dialogue between God and the writer is profound and reflects both the restlessness of the believer and the relentlessness of the Creator. Accompany with a organ or piano. [Hymn Study](#)

Sunday’s Palms are Wednesday’s Ashes

This hymn offers a solid starting point for this Lenten series as we spend each week focusing upon one of the baptismal vows in our ritual. The opening stanza of “Sunday’s Palms” contains the text, “We have marred baptismal pledges, in rebellion gone astray,” so this becomes a vital piece of confession to begin the season. BEACH SPRING offers a reflective tune for the text and one that helps move along the text, too. EBENEZER would be another choice, but understand that the hymn might take twice as long to sing. Accompany with organ or piano.

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

Many congregations have embraced this song as a modern expression of one of the most beloved hymns in our congregational repertoire. The refrain hearkens to Charles Wesley’s own “And Can It Be that I Should Gain,” where Wesley writes, “my

chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee.” This song is often accompanied by a band and vocal praise team, but it can also be accompanied by solo piano, guitar, or even organ. Note that the melody notes included in *Worship & Song* are an ornamental representation of the way Chris Tomlin sings the song, and your congregation may instead sing this as it is used to, which is perfectly acceptable!

[Hymn Study](#)

Come and Fill/In God Alone

These short, cyclic songs by Jacques Berthier are a part of the sung prayer repertoire from the Taizé Community in France. These simple chants offer a way for people to sing prayers in worship. They are also wonderful pedagogical tools for those seeking to strengthen part singing in choirs—both because of their simplicity and their repetition. The Taizé Community recommends using the resources of each context, so accompaniment will vary from place to place. If you visit Taizé, however, you would usually hear an arpeggiated, finger-picked guitar with other obbligato instruments (flute, oboe, brass, strings, etc.) as are available. Sing the song several times to allow the words to transcend the page and become the prayers of your congregation.

Lord, Let Your Kingdom Come

The instructions of this ritual song of intercessory prayer recommend singing in the following form: Refrain--Petition 1--Response, Refrain--Petition 2--Response, and so on. There are many ways this could be done, and you may have to experiment to see what feels appropriate in your context. Another suggestion would be for the choir or congregation to hum on an Eb Major chord or a unison Eb during the petitions and have the leader sing the first two measures of the response, at which point, the pulse and accompaniment picks back up each time. Whatever way you choose to sing, do so in a way that is doesn't feel forced, even if it is appropriately structured.

Taste and See

A standard in the catalog of GIA Publications, Inc., this hymn by James E. Moore offers a short, repetitive refrain for a congregation to sing while receiving the elements of Holy Communion. Singing these kinds of refrains in the midst of ritual action allows the congregation to move freely and not be encumbered by a book or bulletin. The stanzas are to be sung by a soloist, and the accompaniment is piano, guitar, and/or organ. Any combination of these instruments will work beautifully. [History of Hymns](#)

Come to the Table of Grace

This hymn offers the same possibility as “Taste and See” by having only a few repetitive words and phrases. “Grace” is replaced in different stanzas by the words “peace,” “love,” and “joy.” One of the best characteristics of this song is its ability to defy

a set style or genre; it can be used in any setting, depending on the accompaniment and the tempo. Use some creative imagination to explore ways to enhance this simple song in your worship. [Hymn Study](#)

The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve

LAND OF REST provides a beautiful and lilting setting for moving forward to “comfort those who mourn,” “be the hands of Christ,” and “go to serve in peace.” This folk melody has a beautiful accompaniment, but the inclusion of the melody line only in the Pew Edition of *The Faith We Sing* allows for some creativity in the accompaniment. Since it is largely, though not completely, pentatonic, this would also be a wonderful opportunity for some enhanced accompaniment from children on Orff instruments or other instruments with a simple, memorizable pattern. A good way to approach an improvised accompaniment on a keyboard or strummed instrument would be to use different harmonic combinations of the notes F, G, A, C, and D. (The Bb does appear in the melody, but quite infrequently). Any combination of these notes should work against the melody. [History of Hymns](#)

As We Go

Jeremy Johnson has written a very short and memorable chorus with “As We Go.” I have personally used this song to close a number of events, and accompaniment can work with any keyboard or strummed instrument and light percussion, if desired. If it is unfamiliar to your congregation, use a choir or soloist to model the song in its entirety, then welcome the congregation to sing the second time through. This is a song that is easily adopted as a song of sending forth throughout a particular month or season, and that is by far the best way to introduce it to your congregation. Allow time to help with the teaching.

Walk with Me

By singing the stories of those who inspire faithfulness (in this case, Moses, Peter, and Mary Magdalene), this hymn will inspire your congregation to live their week reflecting upon these examples of those who followed God. In the midst of such trying times as we are currently witnessing, sending your congregation forth with a message of unity and solidarity is one of the most important things you can do when entrusting your flock to the world. Accompany this hymn with a piano or organ. If you have a choir, encourage them to sing four-part harmony on the refrain (lines 1 and 2). On the last stanza, I would recommend dividing the congregation in half and instructing them to turn, face the other half, and sing to one another, directing them to sing this as they would to inspire and encourage their neighbors. Holding hands on the last refrain might even be a way to share this witness of unity before leaving worship.

As We Part for the Towns and Cities

When considering this title by John Thornburg for inclusion in *Worship & Song*, we discovered that John had written the text to be paired with the tune AS THE DEER. It seemed like a logical choice and one that would be sung because of the widely recognized tune. However, we quickly learned that the copyright holder would not allow that tune to be set with any other hymn than “As the Deer.” Gary Alan Smith called me in haste, saying, “I need a tune ASAP.” This hymn tune, CONNECTION, was the result. It is important to note that John’s text is a prayer, and so it should be sung in the hope that God will answer these prayers, even as the congregation sings the song. Piano, guitar, or organ can all serve as appropriate accompaniment. Should your choir be looking for an arrangement of this in a choral format, you can order a setting published by Choristers Guild [here](#).

Beautiful Things

This song is alluded to a few times in this service, and we encourage its use on Ash Wednesday because it is incredibly appropriate for this occasion. “You make beautiful things out of the dust” is a reminder of what God can do in the midst of our frailty and brokenness. Your congregation may already be familiar with this song through a vacation Bible school curriculum, but there is a suggestion to be made if you are only familiar with the recording by Gungor. You will notice in his recording that he eventually takes the chorus up one octave to a range unattainable by almost all congregations. My simple recommendation is to sing in the key of D, and continue singing the melody in its octave. To simulate the jump Gungor makes, a male voice could sing lead on the melody until the jump, at which point a female voice takes over. This will achieve the same octave leap, but typically people do not strain when they hear a female voice singing in a lower range. If this leap is not important in the worship dynamic you envision, feel free to sing in a lower range throughout. Accompaniment is best supported with a piano, guitar, or band.

PREACHING NOTES

I live in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, a town that was created in 1942 for the sole purpose of producing the two atomic bombs that were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan, the result of which effectively drew a close to the second World War. Nowadays, Oak Ridge is home to the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which continues its cutting-edge work in nuclear research and computer science and is home to the world’s largest supercomputer.

Living in Oak Ridge is interesting. It is a small town with an unusually heavy federal law enforcement presence. Not only do we have local police, but we have undercover federal agents patrolling our quiet neighborhood streets. On the first Wednesday of each month, just as in many towns across America, Oak Ridge tests its emergency alert system by blowing a sustained horn for one minute. Even though I have lived in Oak Ridge long enough now to know what the sound is, it still catches me by surprise when I hear it. Oak Ridge is also subject to frequent loud explosions of unknown (at least to the citizens) origin, or “booms” as the locals call it, which shake the very foundations of the mountains upon which our homes are built. These sounds cause more than passing curiosity among residents. In the back of our minds, we always have a little fear that the boom we just heard is of a sort that could cause catastrophic damage in a matter of seconds. There is probably little basis to this fear, but nevertheless, I imagine most Oak Ridgers feel it anyway.

When the prophet [Joel](#) calls upon the emergency response system of Zion to “blow the trumpet,” he is essentially setting off an alarm like the one we hear every first Wednesday at noon in Oak Ridge. This alarm is not a test, however. It is a signal that they are in a state of emergency. What’s the emergency? The day of the Lord is coming near. And the response of the people is prescribed. They are to begin preparations for this imminent visitation by assembling the people and calling them to return their hearts to the Lord. There is no time to waste. They must gather the people, sanctify a fast, and throw themselves on the mercy of the Lord before it is too late.

While Ash Wednesday may not signal an imminent return of the Lord (for no one knows the day or the hour of his return, not the angels in heaven or even the Son, but only the Father), it does serve as an annual test of our emergency response systems as disciples of Jesus Christ. The annual call to observe a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word, and by marking a right beginning of repentance by receiving a mark of our mortal nature is a reminder that we need to live as people who are prepared to stand before our Lord at any time, even as early as this very day, to receive the judgment that the Lord renders upon our lives.

It is a stark reminder that life is brief. Every moment is precious. We never know when our time on earth will come to an end. And so we must do all that we can with our lives, with each second and minute and hour and day that our Lord grants us, to live in the way that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has taught us to live.

As Christians, our call is to seek to please not the people around us, but the God who made us. [Matthew](#) tells us that the way to do this is to “not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

As we begin this holy season together, let us not ignore the warning that is blared by the emergency response system testing that is built into our tradition. Let us instead take it as a clarion call to action. Let us hear the invitation to observe a holy Lent as our marching orders, in which we get up and do what we need to do to be prepared for whatever may come, this day and every day. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we march courageously and faithfully through this season side by side, shoulder to shoulder, as disciples trusting completely in the promises of our God, made known to us in Jesus Christ.

PLANNING NOTES

Ash Wednesday is the formal “kick-off” to the season of Lent. We start this time of intensive preparation for baptism or realigning our lives with the vows of the baptismal covenant acknowledging our human limitations. We are mortal. We have deeply ingrained habits marked by sin, stained by selfishness, and resistant to our own efforts to change them.

We begin in penitence. Penitence does not mean “feeling sorry” or “feeling guilty,” though these feelings may sometimes accompany the work of penitence. Penitence as

we embody it in this service and throughout this season means acknowledging where we are, owning up to it, recognizing we cannot fix ourselves, and seeking God's mercy and power to renew us in God's ways.

This service of Ash Wednesday has many moving parts: music, graphics, readings, blessing and imposition of ashes, Communion. There are two things to keep in mind about services with many moving parts: One is the need for rehearsal to ensure that all parts work smoothly together and flow from beginning to end. Keep rehearsing until you need minimal or no verbal cues to move to the next step. The other is with as much ritual action as this service holds, less is more when it comes to additional words. Focus on nonverbal actions, and leave good space for silence. Let the words of Scripture, songs, and prayers be the primary verbalized parts. This is why we have placed the sermon in brackets in the order of worship. You may decide you do not need a sermon.

Finally, as people depart in silence, consider giving them a list of the formation groups and Courageous Conversation opportunities and where and when they meet during the coming weeks, with a note to pray for all people who are seeking Christ or a deeper knowledge of him through this season.

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT: RENOUNCE

March 5, 2017

FULL SERVICE

“Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?”

ENTRANCE

Enter in silence. No prelude. No video. No opening hymn or other music. Invite congregation simply to listen, to enter the soundscape of a desert:

*https://archive.org/details/aporee_28172_32458 or
https://archive.org/details/aporee_30865_35494*

At an appropriate time, signal the congregation to rise for the reading of the gospel, facing the back of the congregation, where the readers and the pastor or deacon stand by the font, filled with sand.

WORD AND RESPONSE

Matthew 4:1-11

Translation by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Reader 1: Narrator

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He had fasted forty days and forty nights. After all that, he was hungry.

The tempter said as he came toward him:

Reader 2: Tempter

If you are son of God, just speak the word so these stones may become loaves of bread.

Reader 1:

But replying, he said,

Congregation:

It is written: A person lives not by bread alone, but from every word proceeding from the mouth of God.

Reader 1:

Then the devil takes him into the holy city, and stood him on the peak of the temple, and says to him:

Reader 2:

If you are son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, "He has given commands to his angels about you, and they will bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against stone."

Congregation:

Again, it is written, "You shall not test the Lord your God."

Reader 1:

Again the devil takes him onto a very high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he says to him:

Reader 2:

I will give all of these to you, if you'd but take the knee and worship me."

Reader 1:

Then Jesus says to him:

Congregation:

Get out of here, Satan. For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and to him alone shall you give your service."

Reader 1:

Then the devil leaves him be, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

Silence.

Pastor: Do *you* renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?

All:

**We do,
and with God's help
we will continue to live out
our renunciation, rejection, and repentance
by doing no harm,
and by avoiding evil of every kind.**

The readers return to their seats. The pastor walks to the front of the worship space. The people turn facing front.

Sermon

"Renounce"

Living the Call: Renounce, Reject, Repent

Invite all people to identify one spiritual force of wickedness they have renounced or now pledge to renounce, at least one evil power of this world they reject and pledge to continue to reject, and one sinful pattern of their lives they commit to turn from. Invite them to make two copies of these items, and give one copy to one other person with whom they will check in during the coming week to share progress and offer mutual support. As they live the call this week, ask them to document times when they've successfully persevered in each area, as well as times when they've failed and needed to ask for more help. Midweek formation groups will be another opportunity to check in, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

The choir or band may offer a solo piece or anthem during this time of response.

“Desert Song”
 “Jesus, Tempted in the Desert”

[CCLI # 5060793](#) OR
 TFWS 2105

When all have completed and exchanged their papers, a deacon or lay minister may lead the congregation in prayer and confession of sin.

Prayers of the People

Renouncing all allegiance to spiritual forces of wickedness, we pray for the deliverance and protection of all who have come under their sway:

**For all persons kept in poverty or slavery,
 all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors,
 all who face addiction of any kind,
 and all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Rejecting evil powers of this world, we pray for all who seek to use their power for the common good:

**For leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life;
 for our families, friends, and neighbors;
 and for all who work to sustain and protect our lives
 as military, civilian workers, and first responders;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Repenting of our sin, we turn to you to lead us in the ways of love, healing, righteousness, and peace, and we pray:

for all who need your healing power, and for all who offer healing through their skill and presence; and for all who have harmed us, and all whom we have harmed by our action or inaction;

Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Pastor:

Receive the prayers of your people, most merciful God.
 In your compassion, forgive our sins,
 and free us for lives of joyful obedience
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Silence

Pastor:
In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

People:
In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.
All: Glory to God! Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Pastor:
Forgiven and free, offer the peace of Christ to one another and your gifts to God.

The peace is exchanged as the offering is collected.

Offertory Music

The Great Thanksgiving

[BOW 60-61](#) or

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.
To you alone, O God, is our allegiance!

Bless the Lord!
God's holy name be praised!

Praised in heaven, praised in earth,
praised throughout your creation
is your name, Holy Triune God.

The trees of the field rejoice in your salvation,
and clap their hands.

The stars shine out your glory,
and the earth trembles at your presence.

Winds and waters scatter at the sound of your voice,
and we, with all creation, cry "Holy!"

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is Christ who comes in your name!

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed are you, Jesus Christ,
 Word made flesh,
 Deliverer from evil.
 Led into the desert by the Holy Spirit,
 broken and strengthened by your fast,
 you have shown us the way
 to live by God's word,
 to reject the lure of glory,
 and to give our worship and our service
 to God alone.

Blessed are you, Jesus Christ.

Blessed are you for coming among us
 and for offering yourself to us
 in this holy meal
 to fill our hungry souls,
 to reveal your glory from a crucifix,
 and to empower us to break free from sin's hold
 and walk humbly with God and neighbor.

With your first disciples, on the night of your betrayal into death,
 you took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, saying:
Take and eat this, my body given for you.

Then you took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it, saying:
Drink this, my blood of the new covenant for you.

Even so,
 here and now,
 come, Holy Spirit.
Come, Holy Spirit.

Come upon these gifts
 and upon us.
 Make them be for us
 Christ's body and blood,
 that we who receive them may be for all
 the body of Christ enlivened by his blood.

Come, Holy Spirit.
Make us one.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Unite us with you.

Come, Holy Spirit.
Revive us!

Make us whole and holy on this day,
 as we await that day
 when we shall feast with Christ
 in the new creation.

To Christ, to you, and to the All-Merciful Creator,
 One God, living and true,
 be all praise, and honor, and glory
 now and forever.
Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread and Distribution**Music during Communion**

“Beautiful Things”

[CCLI # 5665521](#)

“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”

UMH 521

Thanksgiving after Communion

Pastor and People:

Jesus, thank you!

**You have fed us with yourself
 that we may be bound to you in love,
 and overcome every temptation
 to bind ourselves again to any other power.
 In the power of the Holy Spirit,
 keep these bonds strong,
 and send us forth to set others free
 from evil’s dominion. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

Invite the congregation to face the back of the sanctuary, toward the exits.

Hymn/Song

“Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days”

UMH 269

(Tune: House of the Rising Sun, W&S

3072)

Deacon or Lay Leader (from the back of the worship space)

Keep telling the devil, “Get out of here!”

We renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness.

Keep working with compassion for justice for every person.

We reject the evil powers of this world.

Keep building good habits of heart.

We repent of our sin.

Pastor

Go then, with the blessing of our Triune God.

We go to live our baptismal calling. Amen.

Postlude

Variations on House of the Rising Sun (*ad. lib.*)

MUSIC NOTES

Desert Song

This poignant song from Hillsong in Australia effectively draws upon the imagery and metaphor of the desert and offers the words of praise in both times of desert and harvest. The rhythm of the verses is syncopated, but it is repetitive enough that it should be easily learned by the congregation (the rhythm is very similar to the song “Days of Elijah,” if that is in your repertoire of congregational singing). The possibility of only teaching the congregation the chorus is an option, but the verses are vivid with enough imagery that it would be best for the congregation to sing them as well. Accompaniment for this song can be as simple as a piano playing quarter-note chords underneath the melody or an acoustic guitar with a driving rhythm, or it can be as complex as a whole band. Whatever resources you have in your congregation can make this an accessible option for this First Sunday in Lent. The ideal key is B minor (relative to D Major).

Jesus, Tempted in the Desert

EBENEZER is an ideal tune for use on this day, especially with this text by Herman Stuempfle, Jr. The hymn recalls the places in which Jesus was taken in the midst of his temptation and recreates the conversation between Jesus and the devil. The last stanza is the opportunity for the congregation to live into the text, consider what temptation is in today’s context, and pray for strength to withstand the tempter. Because of the length of the phrases and the pulse needed, the tune allows for a good deal of time to be spent in reflection upon this text. Make note, however, that this hymn takes longer to sing than other 87.87 D tunes, so plan accordingly. It has a march-like quality that can also be interpreted as defiant, but be sure to interpret each stanza so the accompaniment can vary. This will allow the narrative quality of the hymn to shine through, and it will keep the congregation from focusing on how long it takes to sing the hymn. The best accompaniment is by organ or another keyboard instrument, but the starkness of the wilderness can also be created by singing at least one stanza with the only accompaniment being a hand drum (use the rhythm found in the melody of the first measure - half note/quarter-note triplet/half note/half note - as a repetitive rhythm) and solo wind instrument on the melody. Bring all the instruments together on the final stanza. [History of Hymns](#)

Beautiful Things

This week, we suggest the use of this song during Communion. “You make beautiful things out of the dust” is a reminder of what God can do in the midst of our frailty and brokenness. Your congregation may already be familiar with this song through a vacation Bible school curriculum, but there is a suggestion to be made if you are only familiar with the recording by Gungor. You will notice in his recording that he eventually takes the chorus up one octave to a range unattainable by almost all congregations. My simple recommendation is to sing in the key of D, and continue singing the melody in its octave. To simulate the jump Gungor makes, a male voice could sing lead on the melody until the jump, at which point a female voice takes over. This will achieve the same octave leap, but typically people do not strain when they hear a female voice singing in a lower range. If this leap is not important in the worship dynamic you envision, feel free to sing in a lower range throughout. Accompaniment is best supported with a piano, guitar, or band.

I Want Jesus to Walk with Me

A Lenten favorite among many congregations, “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” is a spiritual that has a wailing character that seems to embody the desolation found in the Scripture this week. This hymn would be sung very slowly in many African American settings, and we encourage its use in that style. It has, however, also been used slightly faster when sung with a band as a blues option. Just make sure the tempo is not too brisk; it still needs to have a lamenting quality (“When my heart is almost breaking”). Accompany with an organ, piano, acoustic guitar, or band. You may also choose to adapt the time signature from 4/4 to 12/8 to offer a slow, swing version that has a bluesy pulse and character.

Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days

When singing this hymn, there is nothing wrong with using the LAND OF REST tune found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. However, you might choose a different approach by using HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN. Dean McIntyre’s wonderful arrangement of this tune can be found in *Worship & Song*, No. 3072 (“Cast Out, O Christ”). Singing the hymn with this tune paints the wilderness with a certain harshness that will ultimately sit in stark difference to the milieu of Easter Sunday. The incorporation of this one tune helps characterize this Lenten series and enhance the baptismal vows we will affirm throughout the season. Even though the classic version of this tune you may know by The Animals is in A minor, we recommend D minor for congregational singing. Accompany with a heavy hand on the piano, or use guitar and/or full band.

On November 15, 2016, in a [speech](#) given at Oxford Union, renowned physicist Stephen Hawking made a startling prediction. He said that he believed our days on this planet are numbered. Hawking stated that dire threats to humanity and to the planet, brought about by the clear and present dangers of global nuclear war, climate change, artificial intelligence, genetically engineered viruses, and other evil powers, threaten the existence of earth itself. He suggested that we have 1000 years to find another planet that might support human life, and he said that the longer human beings live on Earth, the higher the risk of Earth's demise.

Well, I must say that even though I believe Stephen Hawking is a brilliant scientist, on this one, I'm going to put my trust in Jesus when he said, "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the father" (Matthew 24:36, NRSV). No one, not even Jesus, can predict when the end will come, be it for us as individuals or for the world as we know it.

But at the same time, I can't ignore the very real sins that Hawking points us to in his warning. And let us be clear: what we are talking about here is sin, pure and simple. It is a sin for human beings to contribute to the destruction of God's creation. It would be the greatest dishonor to our creator that we could ever make, an irreversible and permanent mortal sin, if this earth were to be destroyed by our hands—we who were created in God's image and given the responsibility to act as stewards of God's magnificent creation. This isn't a political position or my personal opinion. And in contrast to what Stephen Hawking said, I don't believe this is just about the preservation of humanity. It is about the potential destruction of most, if not all, of life on this earth that we say we believe God has brought into being.

If, during the season after Epiphany, we set our focus on individual conversion—inviting people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—then during the season of Lent, we turn our attention to the communal dimensions of our faith. Over the next five weeks, we will explore what it means to make a commitment to join in the work of Christ in the world through baptism into the community of faith.

As my colleague Taylor Burton-Edwards has noted, Lent is traditionally a season set aside for preparing people to take the next step in the journey toward discipleship by

being baptized into the body of Christ, the church. In United Methodism, baptism is not an act by an individual. We don't perform private baptisms because, for us, baptism is not simply a mark of our personal profession of faith in Christ. Baptism is an act of the community of Christ. It is a covenant between an individual, Christ, and a community of faith, to live together as disciples and to give our whole lives over to being incorporated into the body of Christ. The focus is on the *corporate* nature of the ritual. In baptism, we make a commitment to hold one another accountable as disciples of Jesus Christ and to confess our sins, not just as individuals, but as human beings forging a life together, bound eternally by the Spirit of Christ.

Like American culture, American Protestant Christianity has always had a tendency to individualize the faith. We like to focus on our relationship with Jesus Christ, our individual salvation, and our personal sins. But historically, Christianity, in general, and United Methodism, in particular, has not placed the emphasis of our relationship to God through Christ so exclusively on the shoulders of the individual. And if there is any kernel of truth in what Stephen Hawking predicts about the future of life on Earth, I think it would behoove us all to return to our more communal roots when it comes to thinking about our baptismal vows.

Fortunately for us, the introduction to the Service of the Baptismal Covenant draws immediate attention to the communal nature of our ritual:

Through the Sacrament of Baptism

we are initiated into Christ's holy Church.

We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation

and given new birth through water and the Spirit.

All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

"The Services of the Baptismal Covenant of The United Methodist Church as Revised to Align with the 2008 Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions," Copyright © 2009, The United Methodist Publishing House. Published by The General Board of Discipleship with permission from The United Methodist Publishing House. Italics mine. All subsequent quotes marked SBC are from this source.

Mark Stamm, in his new booklet, *The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church*, says it this way: “Through baptism, we are born anew by the free gift of God and placed within this family called church” (Mark Stamm, *The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2017).

Community. Corporate. Family. Congregation. Church. These words all point clearly to our understanding that, for United Methodists, baptism is both individual and communal.

So as we begin our journey toward the baptismal font today, let us be reminded first and foremost that when we make our initial vow in front of the body of Christ when we are presented for Holy Baptism, to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin,” (SBC) we are not just renouncing the spiritual forces that we struggle with as individuals. We are also rejecting the evil powers that are loose in the world. Likewise, we are not just repenting of our sins as individuals. We are also repenting of the sins of humankind as a whole.

Now, I have to confess here that in the past, when I have read the story of Jesus being tempted by the devil for forty days, I have, like a good American, tended to focus on what this story means in terms of how Jesus’ struggle with the temptations presented by the Devil apply to me as an individual. This time around, the Spirit and my colleagues have inspired me to consider what the temptation means for us not as individuals, but as the body of Christ. How can we understand the temptations in terms of our communal sin?

For simplicity’s sake, let me suggest that the three temptations faced by Jesus correspond to temptations we vow to renounce, reject, and repent of in our first baptismal vow. In his book, [*The Word before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*](#), Charles Campbell portrays Jesus as a person whose entire ministry is about renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting the evil powers of this world, and repenting of our sinful behavior, both individual and corporate.

Campbell interprets the story of the temptations in the wilderness in terms of Jesus’ resistance to what Walter Wink calls the evils of the “Domination System.”

BEGIN SIDEBAR “WALTER WINK ON THE DOMINATION SYSTEM”

By Dr. Dawn Chesser

Walter Wink develops his work in a trilogy of three books: *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (1984); *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (1986); and *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (1992). It is in the third book that he really begins to articulate his understanding of what he calls the “Domination System.”

Wink imagines the “principalities and powers” so often referred to in the Bible as being largely impersonal. They are part of our culture. They are embedded in our institutions. They are the pool in which we all swim. In the ancient world people encountered them in the institutional forms of Roman life: legions, governors, crucifixions, payment of tribute, Roman sacred emblem and standards (Walter Wink, [*Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*](#). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992. 7). In Nazi Germany, people spoke of the palpable evil in the “air,” a pervading “atmosphere that hung over the land and filled the world with foreboding and menace (Wink, 8). We might speak today of the awful terror we felt, something that just wouldn’t go away, after 9/11. Or we might talk about the “spirit” of evil that has led people to respond by organizing through groups such as Black Lives Matter. While we might use personal words to speak of evil—Satan, demons, evil spirits, bad juju—what we are describing is not personal. It is systemic. It is a collective feeling, an experience of something that we know is bad, and that we fear, and that is powerful, and that we must fight against. But ultimately, we may have difficulty locating the specific source of this power. Nevertheless, it is real. We experience it in the world, and we as human beings must contend with it. When these “powers” that we feel become organized into a particular worldview, then the “evil” can become associated with a particular group. We divide ourselves into good and evil, saints and sinners, righteous and unrighteous. Evil gets projected on others, until finally our “demons” devolve into “isms”: racism, sexism, political or religious oppression, patriarchy, militarism, corporate greed, xenophobia, ecological destruction:

“I use the expression ‘the Domination System’ to indicate what happens when an entire network of Powers becomes integrated around idolatrous values. And I refer to ‘Satan’ as the world-encompassing spirit of the Domination System. . .” (Wink)

He goes on to give an example:

“Think. . . of a riot at a soccer game, in which, for a few frenzied minutes, people who in their ordinary lives behave quite decently on the whole suddenly find themselves bludgeoning and even killing opponents whose only sin was rooting for the other team. Afterwards people often act bewildered, and wonder what could have possessed them. Was it a Riot Demon that leaped upon them from the sky, or was it something intrinsic to the social situation: a ‘spirituality’ that crystallized suddenly, precipitated by the conjunction of an outer permissiveness, heavy drinking, a violent ethos, a triggering incident, and the inner violence of the fans? And when the riot subsides, does the Riot Demon rocket back to heaven, or does the spirituality of the rioters simply dissipate as they are scattered, subdued, or arrested?” (Wink)

END SIDEBAR

Campbell paints the temptation story as the opening act of Jesus’ mission: his ministry, says Campbell, will be to resist the powers and principalities of the present world. Campbell notes that it is ultimately a ministry that will lead to crucifixion at the hands of these very same powers and principalities.

In this story the powers are given a name: “The Devil” and, later, “Satan.” Jesus’ response to the temptations presented by the Devil is clear and consistent. He says no. He resists by faithfully and steadfastly refusing to participate in the worldly system that allows some to dominate at the expense of others (see Charles Campbell, [*The Word before the Powers: And Ethic of Preaching*](#). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002., 44-48).

The first temptation that Jesus refuses is to use his power to preserve himself. Even though he has been fasting for forty days and is surely starving by now, he resists the Devil’s invitation to use his own power to turn stones into loaves of bread. Recalling his forebears in the wilderness, Jesus picks up the Scriptures. In his moment of greatest

need, in order to survive, he turns to the Word of God as his weapon of choice, telling his tempter that “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3). “Like the people in the wilderness who lived on manna, Jesus affirms that dependence on God and obedience to God are more important than securing one’s own survival. . . Jesus says no to making his own survival the top priority and to using his power to meet his own needs” (Campbell, 46).

In the second temptation, the Devil tries to use Scripture itself, demonstrating that the Word of God can be used by the powers of this world in ways that are in direct opposition to the way of God. The Devil quotes Psalm 91:11-12, employing Scripture to tempt Jesus to manipulate God’s Word for his own selfish purposes. By suggesting that Jesus use this particular method as a demonstration of power—in which, for all the world to see, he would jump off the pinnacle of the Temple only to be rescued in the arms of angels, all captured live on every major news network—he would effectively show everyone that he would be exactly the kind of Messiah they wanted. He would be a leader who was willing to use God as a means to achieving his personal, spiritual, and even political goals.

And again Jesus remains resolute in his refusal to capitulate to the ways of the world. He will not test God, nor will he use God for his own gain. Once again taking up Scripture as his primary tool of resistance, he reminds his tempter of what is written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

The final temptation Jesus faces is to use his power to become a king, to willingly use violence to put himself at the top of the worldly Domination System. Again, I turn to Charles Campbell’s powerful interpretation.

“All of the kingdoms can be yours,” the devil tells Jesus, “[if you will just bow down to me and my ways], if you will just lord your power over others and take up the sword of the nations. Take charge of the biological weapons, deploy some troops, command the implementation of a ‘Star Wars’ missile defense system. All the kingdoms can be yours—if you will just use the world’s means of power: domination and violence” (Campbell, 46).

Again Jesus says no, wielding the sword of Scripture against his enemy: “For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” He will not participate in the Domination System of the world. My goodness, he won’t even use his power of domination and violence to take out his tempter! He will follow the way of God even if it costs him his life.

And with that, Jesus orders Satan “away.” The power of the Domination System is quashed, at least for the moment.

SIDEBAR: “HYPAGE, SATANA” (“Get thee behind me, Satan”)

By Taylor Burton-Edwards

Much meaning is packed into the five Greek letters (upage) of the command Jesus gives at the end of his encounter with “the devil” after his forty days of fasting in the Judean desert. The verb is not only placed in imperative, here, but the verb itself is one that would be spoken by a person in authority, most commonly the commander of an army.

This is most telling in the immediate context. It is the devil who has offered Jesus “all the kingdoms in the world and their glory,” yet it is Jesus who comes back with a command as from a commander. “Begone!” or “Get out!” or “Away with you!” or drawing on the transitive usage of this verb, “Get back in line, under *my* authority!”

The devil withdraws. And, as further confirmation of the authority of Jesus, at that very moment, the heavenly host (God’s “angel army”) appears around Jesus, attending to his needs.

END SIDEBAR

But it’s not over, because we can’t consider this text apart from the cross. As Campbell summarizes,

In the temptation stories, the drama of the gospel is foreshadowed both by the powers and by Jesus. On their part, the powers must crucify Jesus because of the “No!” he speaks to their way. Intent on their own *survival* at all costs, the powers must crucify the one who threatens their authority. Committed to

domination by the sword, the powers must put to death the one who challenges their most basic values. Making *idols* of themselves by using God for their own ends, the powers must crucify one who names their pretensions and serves God alone. On his part, Jesus takes up the way of the cross in the wilderness by rejecting the way of survival, domination, violence and idolatry, he takes his first step down the path to crucifixion. If Jesus had chosen the way of survival, he would have avoided crucifixion. If he had chosen the way of violent domination, he would not have succumbed to the cross. And if he had chosen to use God for his own ends—placing effectiveness over faithfulness—he would never have ended up at Golgotha (Campbell, 48).

It is an overthrowing of our own, sinful and distorted understanding of power, and a turning over of power structures, that we see in this story. And it is not just about kingdoms of the world. It is a part of all the temptations we face. Our individual choices always have systemic consequences. Jesus overturns what we see as signs of power and wealth: a full table, the attention of all the people, and even creation itself, bowing down before his power and might.

As noted above, this was not the end of it for Jesus. And it is not the end of it for us. The work of fighting the powers, resisting the Domination System— of renouncing the spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting the evil powers of this world, and repenting of our sins—is ongoing work for each one of us. It isn't one time. We have to continually resist the temptations of this world. We have to return to our baptismal roots again and again to remember what is at stake.

So the church takes this time every year to remind ourselves that we need to join Jesus in the resistance by fasting, and by meditating on God's Word, and by holding one another accountable in Christian love and witness. We can't skip over this step. We have to be with him and with one another in this journey toward what it means to be in a shared life together as the body of Christ.

The good news in this story is that the power of God in Christ is stronger than the power of Satan. The power of good always triumphs over the power of evil, and the power of life—of resurrection—trumps the power of death and destruction every time. There is hope for our future despite the spiritual forces of wickedness and evil powers of this world that we must fight against.

As we move through this season, let us recommit ourselves to joining with Jesus in living out God's mission to fight against the powers and principalities that would seek to destroy not just us, but this world and everything in it.

SIDEBAR: What's at Stake in Today's Baptismal Questions

by Taylor Burton-Edwards

The baptismal questions for today have three active verbs: renounce, reject, and repent. These are not synonyms. Each is its own concrete action, with its own set of implications for how Christians will live our lives.

To **renounce** is a fundamental act of treason. It is to break allegiance to a power or authority to which one had previously given allegiance and service. From the earliest examples of baptismal questions we have, renunciation of Satan or the devil (spiritual forces of wickedness, we say) always comes first.

This is no accident. It follows biblical precedent. The very first story we hear of Jesus after his baptism in the wilderness is his renunciation of Satan. Jesus makes it clear where his allegiances lie, and he shows the way for all who would follow him.

It also follows the pattern of centuries of practice when one seeks citizenship in a new realm or country. One first breaks allegiance to the realm or sovereign of the people from which one has come and only then is in a position to pledge allegiance to the new realm or sovereign.

To **reject** the evil powers of this world is a phrase that draws on exorcistic language. Our English word "reject" comes from the Latin "reicere," which means "to throw out"--and so translates the Greek verb "ekballein," which is used fairly consistently to describe what Jesus does to demons (to cast out, to throw out). We here pledge to do more than not do evil things. We pledge to throw out, to cast out, to shut the door behind any evil powers that seek to operate with us or through us. So we not only break allegiances, we also commit not to allow evil any sway in our lives.

To **repent** of our sin (note the singular!) means more than feeling sorry or remorseful or guilty for bad things we may have done. The Hebrew verb behind repent (shuv) means

“to turn from.” Further, the pledge we make is not simply to turn from “sins” (concrete actions that bring harm) but “sin” itself. The singular points less to individual actions and more toward whole patterns of life. So we here commit to turn and walk away from those patterns of life, habits, and behaviors that damage others and/or our relationships with God, earth, and neighbor.

Obviously, our actions pledging renunciation, rejection, and repentance in this first baptismal question are not completed in the act of baptism itself, even as our salvation is not brought to fruition there. Rather, as baptism initiates us, gets us *started* in the divine life, so also these questions represent our pledge to get *started* on renouncing spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting evil powers of the world, and repenting of sin. These vows about baptism, as all of the baptismal vows, mark the *beginning* of “a long obedience in the same direction” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter 5: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/n/nietzsche/friedrich/n67b/chapter5.html>)

But we shall never even get to the beginning of that “long obedience” if we are not first helping people learn the essential practices necessary to develop the disciplines of such renunciation, rejection, and repentance in their own lives. These include fasting, in whatever form people may practice such abstinence. Lent is the season in the Christian year when we as church commit to offering such practical, hands-on teaching with Jesus as our model and the Spirit as our guide.

END SIDEBAR

SIDEBAR: Baptismal Tai-Chi

by Taylor Burton-Edwards

One of the ways I’ve been offering some practical, hands-on teaching about living our baptismal calling, both in MDiv classes and in retreats I lead focused on this very topic, has been to teach a set of movements, coordinated to the baptismal questions, that I’ve come to call “Baptismal Tai-Chi.” (For students of Tai-Chi out there, I know this is *not* Tai-Chi. It’s a convenient label, that is all.)

When I teach this series of movements to others, I always start with getting the movements down-- beginning to get the actions into muscle memory, as it were. Then, and only then, I add the words of our baptismal questions. We keep practicing it

together throughout the class (before and after each class in the case of seminary classes) or retreat (several times a day, every day of the retreat).

Here are two videos that demonstrate it. If you find it helpful as a tool for your congregation, by all means use it.

Baptismal Tai-Chi at Drew University: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJsNI03pN8o>

Baptismal Tai-Chi at Dinosaur State Park: <https://vimeo.com/118950936>

END SIDEBAR

PLANNING NOTES

First Sunday in Lent

Living Our Baptismal Calling: “RENOUNCE”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

Lent began this past Wednesday. Today is the first Sunday in the Lenten series, “Living the Baptismal Calling.” Today’s focus is on the first baptismal question: “Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?”

Next Sunday, remember to “spring ahead!” The link in the calendar below is to a Time Change Song by my former colleague, Dean McIntyre. You might have your choir or ensemble sing to remind folks either live (in worship this week) or via audio recording and social media during the week ahead.

This year marks the first time we observe what we now call “UMCOR Sunday.” The former designation was One Great Hour of Sharing. The title was changed by General Conference in 2016 to reflect that all funds raised for this day in United Methodist churches are specifically to offset the administrative costs of the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

March

All Month

March 5

[Women’s History Month](#)

New Series Begins: Living Our Baptismal Calling

March 12	Daylight Saving Time Begins (USA)
March 26	UMCOR Sunday (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)
April	
April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God's Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday
May	
<i>All Month</i>	Christian Home Month Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
May 4	National Day of Prayer (USA)
May 5	May Friendship Day
May 8-14	Christian Family Week
May 14	Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day (USA)
May 21	Heritage Sunday
May 24	Aldersgate Day
May 25	Ascension Day
May 28	Ascension Sunday (if transferred)
May 29	Memorial Day (USA)
June	
June 4	Day of Pentecost (Easter Season Concludes)
June 11	Trinity Sunday , Peace with Justice Sunday New Series Begins: TBA
June 18	Father's Day (USA)
June 19	Juneteenth
July	
July 4	Independence Day

For Your Planning Team: Living Our Baptismal Calling "RENOUCE"

In This Series

Lent began this past week with Ash Wednesday. Last Sunday, Transfiguration Sunday, you began your turn toward Lent and previewed this season and series. We've spent the Season after Epiphany inviting others to become introduced to the work and teaching of Jesus and to consider whether they wish to join us as disciples of his way. For those who have said yes to that invitation, Lent is the time of intensive formation to help get them started on his way.

The questions of the baptismal covenant have, for centuries, been the guiding questions for the season of Lent. They are only, in part, questions about doctrine or concepts. They are primarily practical questions about how, concretely, we will live as disciples of Jesus where we are. What are our allegiances? Will we act on those allegiances? How will we work for good and resist evil? Whom will we trust as our protector and deliverer? How will we, in real terms, live in union with all kinds of people from all kinds of places? How will we be faithful to and for one another? How will we support one another in all kinds of circumstances? And then, finally, what is the nature and basic story of the God into whose hands we place our lives and the life of the world?

These are the questions that guide us through these weeks. These are the questions not only for what we will do each week in worship, but also for intentional formation groups that may meet in person or online before the following Sunday each week and that may continue through Easter Season. These formation groups are especially important for people whom you have recently welcomed through your evangelism efforts during the Season after Pentecost. But strongly consider inviting other groups for people who are in the process of preparing for confirmation, as well as for longer term church members or others who seek a deeper grounding in the practices of their faith. We'll provide specific guidance for these groups each week in our Formation Groups resources.

Along with Formation Groups for basic formation in the faith, we are also proposing that you consider creating another kind of formational experience-- what we might call a formational event-- during this season, one that focuses on what our colleague Scott Hughes calls "Courageous Conversations." The Courageous Conversations event each week should not be seen as displacing or replacing the work of other formation groups, but rather as supplementing and underscoring what it means for us to live "in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races." Given the persistence of deep divisions in our nation, divisions that are replicated within our churches and communities as United Methodists, we believe these weekly Courageous Conversation events offer an opportunity for mutual listening, care, and healing that are critical for our future as a denomination, yes, but more importantly critical for the future of Christian witness wherever our churches are across this country.

Today

The biblical journey through this season starts today as it does in each of the three years of the lectionary, with the temptation of Jesus and the example he gives us of our very first move toward discipleship. We begin by renouncing allegiances to spiritual forces of wickedness.

We enact renunciation in this service today four times. We do it at the beginning, facing "liturgical west" (the back of your worship space), in response to the baptismal question, and adding to it language from the First General Rule. (We will use both the baptismal questions and the General Rules in this way these first three Sundays in Lent).

SIDEBAR: FACING EAST FOR WORSHIP, AND WEST FOR ACTS OF RENUNCIATION

For many centuries, since the earliest times of which we have record, Christians have generally built their worship spaces so that the Lord's Table was on the east end of the worship space. This orientation reflects the practice of early Christians at baptism. Apostolic Tradition (ca. 215) is the first (but not the last!) early Christian document to describe how those being baptized on Easter Sunday morning at sunrise would be asked the first baptismal question ("Do you renounce Satan and all his works" in that document) as they were facing west, toward the darkness. They would then turn (answering the question about repentance with a literal turn) toward the east, toward the rising sun, to answer the question about giving their full allegiance to Christ as Savior and Lord, and for the rest of the baptismal ritual. Likewise, they would enter

the baptistery or stream from the west, be baptized, and emerge on the east to be clothed in new baptismal garments.

In more recent years, this physical orientation of worship space toward the rising sun has not always been observed as it was in years past. Still, we can speak of the space where the Lord's Table is placed as "liturgical east" and thus the "back" of the worship space as "liturgical west."

END SIDEBAR

We do it again as a response to the sermon, as we invite people to write down and share with one other person the concrete acts of renunciation, rejection of evil powers, and repentance they will seek to undertake during the coming week. We do it a third time in the shape of our intercessions. And we do it a fourth time in our pledges in the act of sending forth.

Worship today thus provides a solid ground for the work of the week to come-- continuing to renounce, reject, and repent. And there are two kinds of opportunities we're suggesting for follow up on this. There is a person-to-person check in with the individual with whom each person shared his or her card. And there is a formation group meeting midweek or later to check in and strengthen others in this journey. See the formation GROUPS section for more information on this week's meeting.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the First Sunday in Lent](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Germany, France (Elections in France begin April 23; elections in Germany begin between August 27)

FORMATION GROUP NOTES

Formation groups as we hope you will pursue them are like early Methodist class meetings, but with a specific weekly focus. Each formation group is led by an experienced Christian, a seasoned disciple who can testify to how he or she has grown in living out the baptismal calling in his/her life, and how he or she is growing still. The role of the group leader (class leader) is to facilitate the growth of every participant in it, week by week, and to help the group as a whole watch over one another in love as they seek to learn and grow in the basic ways of disciples Jesus named in the baptismal covenant.

It is highly recommended that group size be between five to seven people, including the leader. This will make for a group where all have time to share what they need to share within one hour, and be just large enough that there is a sense of an agenda for the group's time that needs to be honored.

Groups should plan to meet in homes or in third places (coffee shop, café, bar) where all can feel comfortable and all can hear one another without being overheard inappropriately. Strongly consider having the first meeting in the home of the group leader if the group leader's home can accommodate group members comfortably.

Part of the work this first week is getting to know one another and setting ground rules, patterns, and plans as a group. Among the ground rules should be a readiness to listen to one another, to speak for and about oneself, and not to tell others what they "should" do. This group is about

testimony and mutual support as people learn together and help one another begin to live out each of the baptismal vows or live them out more faithfully.

A suggested pattern for the first meeting is

1. Brief, informal time of gathering (10 minutes or so) with snacks to share
2. Formal gathering-- seated in a circle in chairs or around a table-- with brief introductions from each person (5 minutes)
3. Requests for prayer for the coming week (10 minutes)-- and prayer led by the group leader or unison in the group. If the latter, one practice I've found useful in leading such groups is immediately after a person shares, the whole group pauses, then says in unison, "Into your hands, O God, we commend our sister/brother/sibling(s) Name(s)." Proceed to the next person and repeat until all who wish to offer requests for prayer have had the opportunity to do so.
4. Teaching and Testimony-- (30 minutes)-- For this week, there are three verbs to focus on-- *renounce*, *reject*, and *repent*. Take each one, one at a time, for ten minutes each. Begin with a time of brief teaching/refresher on the meaning of each one, for one to two minutes. (See sidebar on the baptismal questions in Preaching Notes, or just below). Then invite people to share how they ARE working on each one, ways they've been able to exercise each one so far this week, and ways they seek support to improve, starting with the group leader to set an example for how to do this (8 minutes). People are free to pass if they wish. Then proceed to the next one.
5. Gather in a circle or huddle, lay hands on one another, one by one, and pray in unison, "X, may you continue to grow in Christ in the days ahead." (5 minutes).
6. Thank all for coming, and send the group out to do it!

SIDEBAR: What's at Stake in Today's Baptismal Questions by Taylor Burton-Edwards

The baptismal questions for today have three active verbs: *renounce*, *reject*, and *repent*. These are not synonyms. Each is its own concrete action with its own set of implications for how Christians will live our lives.

To **renounce** is a fundamental act of treason. It is to break allegiance to a power or authority to which one had previously given allegiance and service. From the earliest examples of baptismal questions we have, renunciation of Satan or the devil (spiritual forces of wickedness, we say) always comes first.

This is no accident. It follows biblical precedent. The very first story we hear of Jesus after his baptism in the wilderness is his renunciation of Satan. Jesus makes it clear where his allegiances lie and shows the way for all who would follow him.

It also follows the pattern of centuries of practice when one seeks citizenship in a new realm or country. One first breaks allegiance to the realm or sovereign of the people from which one has come, and only then is in a position to pledge allegiance to the new realm or sovereign.

To **reject** the evil powers of this world is a phrase that draws on exorcistic language. Our English word "reject" comes from the Latin "reicere," which means "to throw out"-- and so translates the Greek verb "ekballein," which is used fairly consistently to describe what Jesus does to demons (to cast out, to throw out). We here pledge to do

more than not do evil things. We pledge to throw out, to cast out, to shut the door behind any evil powers that seek to operate with us or through us. So we not only break allegiances, we also commit not to allow evil any sway in our lives.

To **repent** of our sin (note the singular!) means more than feeling sorry or remorseful or guilty for bad things we may have done. The Hebrew verb behind repent (shuv) means “to turn from.” Further, the pledge we make is not simply to turn from “sins” (concrete actions that bring harm) but “sin” itself. The singular points less to individual actions and more toward whole patterns of life. So we here commit turn and walk away from those patterns of life, habits, and behaviors that damage others and/or our relationships with God, earth, and neighbor.

Obviously, our actions pledging renunciation, rejection, and repentance in this first baptismal question are not completed in the act of baptism itself, even as our salvation is not brought to fruition there. Rather, as baptism initiates us, gets us started in the divine life, so also these questions represent our pledge to get started on renouncing spiritual forces of wickedness, rejecting evil powers of the world, and repenting of sin. These vows about baptism, as all of the baptismal vows, mark the *beginning* of “a long obedience in the same direction” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Chapter 5: <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/n/nietzsche/friedrich/n67b/chapter5.html>)

But we shall never even get to the beginning of that “long obedience” if we are not first helping people learn the essential practices necessary to develop the disciplines of such renunciation, rejection, and repentance in their own lives. Such disciplines include fasting in whatever form people may pursue it. Lent is the season in the Christian year when we as church commit to offering such practical, hands-on teaching with Jesus as our model and the Spirit as our guide.

END SIDEBAR

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT: ACCEPT

FULL SERVICE

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

March 12, 2017

ENTRANCE

Choir or ensemble processes in, leading the singing:
Medley: “Wade in the Water” and “Go Down, Moses”

Arrangement: Jackson Henry

The pastor stands by the font and stirs up the water in it.

Pastor: Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

People: **We do with the help of God, by doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all people, by giving, visiting, instructing, reproving, and exhorting.**

The deacon or pastor then takes the Bible, and moves with other readers in the midst of the congregation, holding the Bible high, as the people sing as long as needed:

Wade in the water, wade in the water, children.

Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.

WORD AND RESPONSE

Reading

John 3:1-5, 14-17
(Translation, Taylor Burton-

Edwards)

Reader 1: (Narrator)

Now there was a person named Nicodemus sent from the Pharisees, who were religious leaders among the Jewish people. He came toward Jesus at night and said to him:

Congregation: (Nicodemus)

Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, because no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God were with him.

Reader 1:

Jesus answered and said to him:

Reader 2: (Jesus)

Truly, truly tell you, unless you are born anew, you cannot see the kingdom of God.

Congregation:

How can a person be born once old? We can't enter into the mother's womb a second time and be born!

Reader 2

Truly, truly I tell you: Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

And just as Moses lifted on high the serpent in the desert, so also must the Son of Humankind be lifted up, so that everyone believing in him should have eternal life.

All:

This is how much God loved the world: God gave God's only-begotten son, so that everyone believing into him should not be destroyed, but should have eternal life.

Reader 2: For God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but so the world might be saved through him.

As the pastor returns to the pulpit or preaching place after the reading, the congregation sings this refrain as long as needed before the pastor is ready to preach:

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land.
Tell ole Pharaoh, "Let my people go."

Sermon

"Accept"

Call to Accept the Freedom and Power to Resist

People may be invited to write on cards at least one example of evil, injustice, or oppression they know they need to resist and now pledge to do, and one concrete way they will accept the freedom and power God gives them to do so. Invite them to make two copies of these items, and give one copy to one other person with whom they will check in during the coming week to share progress and offer mutual support. As they live the call this week, ask them to document times when they've successfully persevered in each area, as well as times when they've failed and needed to ask for more help. Midweek formation groups will be another opportunity to check in, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

Music during Call to Accept

"Beautiful Things"
"Jesus, Thine All-Victorious Love"

[CCLI #5665521](#) or
UMH 422

Prayers of the People

Accepting the freedom God gives us, we step out and away from every force that seeks to constrain love and justice in our own hearts, and we pray:

**For all people kept in poverty or slavery,
all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors,
all who face addiction of any kind,
and all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Accepting the power God gives us, we speak and act with courage for the freedom and dignity of every human being and the good of all creation, and we pray:

**For leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life;
for our families, friends, and neighbors;
and for all who work to sustain and protect our lives
as military, civilian workers, and first responders;**

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Freed and empowered by God to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in every form in which they present themselves, we band together as Christ's body seeking the deliverance and salvation of all people, and we pray:

for all who need your healing power, and for all who offer healing through their skill and presence; for all who have harmed us, and all whom we have harmed by our action or inaction;

Silence

Lord in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Pastor:

Receive the prayers of your people, most merciful God.

In your compassion, forgive our sins,
and free us for lives of empowered obedience
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Silence

Pastor:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

People:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God! Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Pastor:

Forgiven, freed, and empowered to resist,
let us offer the peace of Christ to one another and our gifts to God.

The people exchange the peace of Christ as the offering is collected and presented if Communion is celebrated. If Communion is not celebrated, the presentation of the collected gifts is part of the Act of Thanksgiving, below.

Music during the Offering and Peace

"This Is Not the End"

"God So Loved the World"

[CCLI# 6189790](#) OR

Stainer, [downloadable score](#):

Act of Thanksgiving (if Communion is not celebrated)

As the offering is presented, the congregation stands and is asked to offer thanks to God with one or both of the following:

“Freedom Is Coming”
 “O Freedom”

TFWS 2192
 TFWS 2194

OR

The Great Thanksgiving

[BOW 60-61](#)

Thanksgiving after Communion

Pastor and People:

Jesus, thank you!

**You have fed us with yourself
 that we may receive your freedom and power,
 to resist evil, injustice, and oppression
 in every form in which they present themselves.
 In the power of the Holy Spirit,
 make us compassionate and just,
 loving neighbors and enemies,
 and you above all. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

Invite the congregation to face the back of the sanctuary, toward the exits.

Hymn/Song “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round” AH 4051

Deacon or Lay Leader (from the back of the worship space)

The way is sometimes more than you can handle.

We accept God’s freedom and power.

There is much work to be done, and many will try to turn you around.

We accept God’s freedom and power to resist.

Remember you are not resisting flesh and blood..

With God’s freedom and power, we will resist

evil, injustice, and oppression

In whatever forms they present themselves.

Pastor

Go then, with the blessing of our Triune God.

We go to live our baptismal calling. Amen.

Postlude

Variations on Freedom Songs

MUSIC NOTES

Wade in the Water/Go Down, Moses

These two spirituals obviously speak well enough on their own, but they can also work in tandem with one another when sung as partner songs. In order to sing them

together, begin by having the entire congregation sing each refrain, one directly after the other. Then simply put them together by dividing your choir and sanctuary into two groups, with one side singing the refrain of one spiritual, and the other side singing the other spiritual simultaneously. To download a written score of the refrains to use in worship, [click here](#). You can also work to put the stanzas together, but they do not fit quite as well as the refrains.

Beautiful Things

“You make beautiful things out of the dust” is a reminder of what God can do in the midst of our frailty and brokenness. Your congregation may already be familiar with this song through a vacation Bible school curriculum, but there is a suggestion to be made if you are only familiar with the recording by Gungor. You will notice in his recording that he eventually takes the chorus up one octave to a range unattainable by almost all congregations. My simple recommendation is to sing in the key of D and continue singing the melody in its octave. To simulate the jump Gungor makes, a male voice could sing lead on the melody until the jump, at which point a female voice takes over. This will achieve the same octave leap, but typically people do not strain when they hear a female voice singing in a lower range. If this leap is not important in the worship dynamic you envision, feel free to sing in a lower range throughout. Accompaniment is best supported with a piano, guitar, or band.

Jesus, Thine All-Victorious Love

Charles Wesley has skillfully encapsulated the nature of grace in this hymn as it explores the beginnings of faith and the ever-continuing work of sanctification. Paired with AZMON, it becomes a vibrant proclamation of our faith in God and the work God has done through Christ. Like many of Wesley’s hymns, the meter doesn’t always make it easy to keep the syllabic emphasis consistent across the stanzas (notice “Jesus” is musically emphasized on the second syllable instead of the first, but “refining” works perfectly). However, do not rule out this hymn because of that tiny issue! Sing this with your congregation, and they will simultaneously sing a public witness of praise to God *and* build a deeper theological vocabulary. Accompany with organ or piano, or create an arrangement of AZMON for your band. G is the ideal key. [History of Hymns](#)

This Is Not the End

Listening to the Gungor recording of this original song by Lisa Gungor, you might be inspired to sing this song with a great variety of instruments in your congregation, and we would encourage you to sing this with whatever instruments are available! This simple song lifts up the fact that “accepting the freedom and power God gives us” allows us to be able to say, “This is not the end.” This, then, becomes a song of hope. Sing it with joy and use the instruments you have: piano, guitar, bass, banjo, bass drum, glockenspiel, or anything else that will support the singing. The original key is Db, but if this key is too inaccessible for your players, taking it up a half step to D should help facilitate easier playing from string, wind, and keyboard instruments.

God So Loved the World

This choral classic by John Stainer may be known enough within your church that the congregation can join along with the choir. If not, don't fret! The choir offering this piece alone is a beautiful offering in worship as well. Churches across the world often await the presence of this Scripture passage in John as an opportunity to sing this work. It is written to be sung *a cappella*, but if that is not possible, accompany with organ or piano, doubling the choral parts.

Freedom Is Coming

If you have a four-part choir (SATB), sing this South African song *a cappella* with African percussion as accompaniment. Begin by having the basses sing the bass line, then layer in each part (tenor, alto, soprano) successively with every repetition. Have a soloist sing the melody line, or allow the sopranos to lead. Make note: if a soloist sings the melody, the sopranos should double the alto part when only unison notes are found in the treble clef.

If you do not have a four-part choir, you can still sing this song! Accompany with a piano playing the choral parts, or play a guitar with heavy rhythmic emphasis on the half-note beats in each measure. If you have a hand drum, djembe, cajon, or other percussion instrument, be sure to add it for rhythmic vitality and stylistic authenticity. Read more [here](#) for more commentary on freedom songs.

O Freedom

This rousing spiritual is a bold proclamation of faith and hope as we accept freedom and power this week. Allow the phrases to dynamically reflect the shape of the melodic contour. In other words, don't sing each "O" as loudly as you would sing the word "freedom;" crescendo toward the key word in each phrase (freedom, moaning, weeping, etc.). Your choir, especially the basses, will love singing this hymn, so encourage them to build toward the refrain, which must take a defiant tone. Accompany with a piano, organ, or a full band. Read more [here](#) for more commentary on freedom songs.

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round

There is no more powerful way to end this service than by singing this unison spiritual that is, in its very "strutting" style, incredibly defiant. Used with interchangeable lyrics in the Civil Rights Movement to stand against the evils of racism, segregation, and violence, this song has the power to be for us a musical way to "accept the freedom and power God gives [us] to resist evil, injustice, and oppression." A number of suggested words from the Civil Rights Movement are used, but the original spiritual is also included at the bottom of the page in *The Africana Hymnal*. Sing this in a very heavy, slow tempo. Singing it *a cappella* is also encouraged if that is an option. Regardless of the accompaniment, work to loosen up the congregation so they do not sing it with a rigid posture. It would even be recommended for the congregation to "march" on each half note to add to the overall character of defiance.

PREACHING NOTES

Lent 2: Accept

Through powerful image of new birth and the biblical story of the serpent in the wilderness, Jesus shows Nicodemus and us what it takes for us to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

If the recent election of Donald Trump as the forty-fifth president of the United States has revealed anything, it is that a significant number of Americans are dissatisfied with their lives. They are disappointed with the hand they have been dealt, and they place the blame for their unhappiness squarely at the feet of the government.

A great number of individuals and families, including many in our United Methodist family, have communicated a strong message through their vote. These Americans believe that our government has let us down so badly that the only viable option was to elect a Washington outsider as president. For a lot of people, Donald Trump represents someone completely different, someone unaffiliated with the political system, and, because of this, someone who many believe might truly be able to offer a different solution.

No doubt some who were looking to be saved from their despair over the state of the union voted for President Trump because they had become weary of the daily struggle: to find a job that pays a living wage; to adequately feed, house, and clothe their families; to make it through another depressing day without drugs or alcohol or another vice to ease the pain; to survive from paycheck to paycheck after the government had taken so much, for taxes, for forced Obamacare, and for government waste, including programs that some perceive as enabling able-bodied persons to avoid working for a living at all.

Whatever the true causes underneath the 2016 election and whoever is to blame for the rampant unhappiness, one thing has become clear: a large number of Americans feel that the dream that was promised to them, the dream that was promised to all Americans, has not been attainable or sustainable for many people. The pain is real, and as church leaders, we have to own our role in failing to see, let alone help to relieve, this suffering. People who feel ignored or left behind by the American political system are clearly searching for something to give them hope. They are looking for someone or something to believe in, someone or something who will finally deliver on the promises, someone or something that will save them too.

At first glance, [Nicodemus](#) does not seem like a man in need of a Savior. He is not in pain. He is not disappointed or angry. He does not appear to be suffering. In fact, it is the opposite. By all measurements of his world, he is a success story. He has made it. He has achieved the Jewish Dream. He is a Pharisee, a member of the ruling class, and a leader among the Sanhedrin.

The character of Nicodemus appears only in the Gospel of John, where he is mentioned on three occasions: this passage from the third chapter, where he comes to Jesus under the cover of night seeking information on who exactly Jesus is and where Jesus

gets his miraculous power; a few chapters later, when he advises his colleagues among "the chief priests and the Pharisees" to hear and investigate the situation more thoroughly before making a judgment concerning Jesus; and toward the end of John's gospel, when he brings a personal donation of one hundred pounds of aloe and myrrh to be used to anoint Jesus for burial after the crucifixion. It is made clear by all of these actions that Nicodemus is a man of both power and means. He is, by today's standards, a prominent member of the educated upper class elite, a Jewish man who achieved worldly success in spite of the fact that he's an outsider in the Roman world.

And yet, in spite of his success, Nicodemus is clearly not satisfied with what his life has become. He comes to Jesus seeking something that all the worldly success in the world can't give him. He seems genuinely drawn to Jesus. I don't read him as coming to see Jesus in order to grab some of Jesus' power for himself, but rather, because he yearns for something deeper and more meaningful in his life than what the world has to offer.

As we consider this encounter, it is important to not miss the detail that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. This would suggest that Nicodemus doesn't really want his friends and colleagues to know that he is interested in Jesus. He doesn't want to risk being publicly associated with the teachings of Jesus or the growing movement Jesus is inspiring. He wants to keep his curiosity about and his admiration for Jesus a secret from those in his circle, at least in this first encounter. In this way, he not only protects his status as a person of privilege, but also maintains the illusion that he is loyal to the values of the world.

Eventually, Nicodemus comes around to letting others know he seeks the light that Jesus offers more than he wants to maintain his privileged status. He makes a public confession of his faith by his actions. By the end of the third encounter, it is clear that Nicodemus has come to believe Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. But it takes him a long time to go public with his true feelings. It takes a long time before he is able to re-enter the womb and be born again, not into the dreams of the world, but into God's dream.

I am writing these notes in December 2016. It has been nearly a month since the election of our new president. Every day, there are new reports on the work he is doing to assemble his new cabinet. But as of today, my sense is that not much healing has taken place. The anger emanating from both sides of the division still seems as fresh and raw as it did on November 9. There is a great deal of work to do, especially in our congregations, to reach across the chasm that divides not just the people of my nation, but people around the globe. It is work that will likely take a very long time.

I feel strongly that the work of healing and reconciliation must start in our religious communities. It begins in our local church communities. But true healing cannot even begin unless we are able to be completely honest with one another. Deep healing, reconciliation, and movement toward unity will not happen if leaders act like Nicodemus and keep their true beliefs hidden in the shadows.

The day after the election I left Nashville to travel to two states to continue my work of improving preaching in the United Methodist Church. In both places that I visited I had the opportunity to talk openly and honestly with leaders and preachers about the election, the state of the nation, the disunity and mistrust in their congregations, and how they would begin to do the much-needed work of bringing healing and reconciliation in the communities they served. I was surprised to learn that pretty much across the board, the pastors and lay leaders I spoke with expressed great reluctance to share their personal opinions about the election with the people they served. Most felt that if they were to claim the truth about who they voted for, especially from the pulpit, they would risk alienating their members, and perhaps even incur punishment from their superiors.

Let me be very clear here. As the Director of Preaching Ministries, I would never suggest that the pulpit be used to bully people or campaign for a particular political candidate. That is an inappropriate use of power.

However, I think we have to be honest about who we are and what we believe, even if the majority of the people we serve do not agree with us. As preachers of the gospel, we must bring our most authentic and honest selves to the work of wrestling with the holy texts with and before the people God has called us to serve. It is a great responsibility that we carry. But we can't refuse to carry it. It is part of the yoke we bear when we place the stole around our necks or accept the authority of appointment as a licensed local pastor and step into the pulpit to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

Preaching always and everywhere incurs risk. But let's be honest: if we avoid risk in order to placate the masses, are we not doing exactly what Nicodemus did? Are we not preaching Jesus under a cover of shadow? What happens to the message of our Savior if we as preachers refuse to present the Word of God openly and honestly, in the full light of day?

In the end, it doesn't matter much who won and who lost in this election. What matters is that we as preachers fully embrace what God has called us to do: to engage the teachings of Jesus seriously and honestly so they can bring the power of God to bear on God's people. It is critical that we let the gospel of Jesus Christ speak to our world, not just in the past, but today, and every day, every week, every year, every decade, for every generation until Christ comes in final glory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Because what is at stake is great. It is greater than any election. It is greater than any worldly success or any worldly failure. What is at stake is life itself.

What Jesus offered Nicodemus was something much greater than anything the world could give him. It is something much greater than anything the world can give us.

One of the frustrating things about preaching the lectionary is that sometimes it skips things, or it starts or stops in the wrong place for what God is placing on our hearts as heralds of the good news. In my opinion, such is the case with today's reading. I wish

this time around that the makers of the lectionary would have continued the reading into the next four verses, because for me, that is where we get to the real meat of this story.

After Jesus speaks the beautiful verses beloved and committed to the memories of most his followers—"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"—he goes on to say,

Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God (John 3:18-21 NRSV).

It is easier to let the story of Nicodemus end on a positive note. It is comforting to rest on the idea that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but will have eternal life, and just leave it there.

The problem is, if we stop there, we risk inviting disciples of Jesus Christ to understand faith primarily in terms of assent. We are born again and saved for eternal life simply by saying the right words. The incredible call to return to the womb and be born again is reduced to saying we are disciples of Jesus Christ. With these words, we are assured of salvation without ever having to change a single thing about our lives. But if we do that, if we stop at words only, I'm afraid we miss the message Jesus had for Nicodemus and for us. Especially in America, where saying we are Christian affords us privilege over other faith traditions. We can say we believe in Jesus in the full light of day and rejoice in our privileged status, even as we continue to commit evil deeds under the shadow of night.

But Jesus asks for more than that from Nicodemus and from us. He says we must be born again. He suggests that believing in him is less about what we say than it is about what we *do*. "Those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God" (verse 21). In John's Gospel, believing cannot be separated from doing.

It is one thing to say that we are Christians, but it is another thing entirely to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. And yet, how often do the words of our second vow flow simply from our lips without sinking in fully when we stand before the congregation to present ourselves or our children for Christian baptism:

Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?

Yes! We give our verbal assent.

But then what? Now what? What changes in our lives, in our hearts, in our souls? How do our lives testify that we been born again by the Spirit of Christ? How has baptism into this new life, this being birthed into a whole other kind of world, claimed us? How has it reoriented us away from living according to the ways of *this* world and birthed us into the kingdom of God that has been ushered in by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

There have always been Christians in name only. In every generation there have been those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ, but who continued to live in the shadows and love evil more than they loved the light of truth that comes from God. Consider this example from George Stroud, writing in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* ("Theological Perspective" for the Gospel reading, Second Sunday in Lent, Year A, Volume 2: Lent through Eastertide):

"In his seven letters to the churches in Asia, John of Patmos warned them to beware of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2: 6, 15), Christians who were willing to offer worship to pagan and Roman gods in order to remain unnoticed, if not tolerated, in a non-Christian world. In the sixteenth century John Calvin referred to those who sympathized with the movement for the reform of the church but were reluctant to be publicly identified with it as "Nicodemites." In the midst of National Socialism, the Nicodemites' heirs, the German Christians, sought to accommodate the gospel to the racism and anti-Semitism of Nazi ideology. In response, the Confessing Church in May 1934 declared, in the second thesis of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, "As Jesus Christ is God's assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness he is also *God's mighty claim upon our whole life.*"

You and I stand at the end of a long line of human beings whose history is one of being aggressive to the point of ruthlessness. The ancestors of this great nation took land from the indigenous people and broke every treaty we ever made with them. Others took people by force from the continent of Africa, enslaved them for generations, and later went to war to uphold their right to treat human beings as property.

We the people are using up the natural resources in this land and around the globe at an alarming and destructive rate: cutting down the trees that clean our air and protect the surface of the planet; polluting the soil and water that sustains all life on Earth; and leeching the lifeblood out of the earth's veins and burning it up to power our extravagant lifestyles, all of which pollutes and destroys the atmosphere we must have in order to survive. We have bullied our neighbors to the north and to the south and paid off corrupt leaders in every part of the world. Our own United Methodist Church, instead of being the House of God working into usher in God's kingdom, has instead succumbed increasingly to marketplace values and grown to represent not the oppressed of our world, but rather, the status quo!

So that what I must confess is that while I have assented with my lips to accept the freedom and power that God gives me to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves, I have yet to return to the womb and be born again if I am to be judged by my deeds. I drive a car, fly around the country and the world, and live a lifestyle of absolute luxury when compared to the lives of the majority of people on this planet, all while being fully aware that maintaining it comes at great cost to others. I choose to remain in this denomination as one of its pastors, and in doing so, knowingly and willingly participate in a system tainted by sin and envy and oppression.

And what I say of the United Methodist Church of course goes for other denominations. What I have said of my own country can be said of other countries. What I said of myself is true of others. Isaiah said it best, centuries and centuries ago: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a (wo)man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5).

Nobody is pure. I am corrupt. My nation is corrupt. My church is corrupt. The WORLD is corrupt. "But God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

We may have made our vows, but many of us, maybe all of us, have not been born anew into the lifestyle Jesus requires. We continue to refuse to listen to our God, believe in our God, and most importantly, obey our God.

The good news is God would not have us perish. God would have us every one have eternal life. God did not send Christ into the world to condemn it, but to save it. God sent Christ to be lifted up before the eyes of the world, that all who would believe might be healed of this sin that infects us all.

Just like Nicodemus, we desperately need to be born again. We need someone or something to believe in besides ourselves and our dreams of material prosperity. We need to raise our eyes from where they have been fixed on our own navels. We need to get ourselves uncentered from our own problems and our own personal needs.

When the Son of Man is lifted up, anyone who does not love the misery and evil in his or her own heart will, just like Nicodemus, be drawn to Jesus and compelled to follow in his example.

All of which leads me to Jesus himself. Once we encounter Christ Jesus, once we begin to study him and learn what he really said and what he really taught—not the glorified, super-hero, knight on a white horse sent to rescue me alone from my personal sins—but rather, the Jesus of history, the radical, rabble-rouser revolutionary who openly resisted evil and injustice, who stood up against the oppressors and the status-quo of his day, who turned over the tables in his own Temple—once we come to know that Jesus, either we love him enough to want to be born again into the way of life that he taught, or we don't.

Because to love him is to love the taste of healing and self-giving and justice and inclusivity and mercy. Love means to hunger and thirst after a way of life that opens us up more and more to other people. For that is who the Son of Man was and is: the person for others, the one who could not consider himself apart from others or others apart from himself.

The dreams of this world whisper to us to be independent, to make our own way, and to judge for ourselves what is good and what is bad. But Jesus Christ, the one from whom Nicodemus could not stay away, is not a teacher from this world and its dreams. He is a teacher from God (verse 2).

Living into our vow to **accept** the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves is not something we accomplish by vocalizing our assent on the occasion of our baptism. It takes a lifetime of commitment, and study, and practice, and constant new beginnings.

Only through him will we truly find rest for our souls, and only in him will we discover the very thing Nicodemus so craved that he risked himself and, finally, gave his life completely over to when he accepted fully that Jesus was the only one who could truly save him and was born again, by water and the Spirit of Christ.

SIDEBAR: “Everyone believing INTO him...”

By Taylor Burton-Edwards

Greek and Latin have distinctive ways of handling the verb “to believe” (*pisteuein* or *credere*) we do not have in English.

In these two languages, the verb “to believe” is often followed by one of two distinct preposition structures. In Latin, the preposition is the same in both structures (*in*), but the case it takes varies (either ablative or accusative). In Greek, there are actually two different prepositions (*en* and *eis*), the first taking the dative and the second taking the accusative.

The ablative or dative construction in these two languages is the rough equivalent of “to believe in” as in “to have confidence in” or “to give assent to.” This construction shows up in verse 15 of this week’s reading.

The accusative construction, translated literally, would be “to believe into.” As already noted, we don’t use that construction in English. But it is by far the most frequent way the Greek New Testament describes saving faith. It’s also the construction that begins

every article of both the Apostles and the Nicene Creeds.

“Believing into” is a bit more intense than “believing in” or “having confidence in.” It’s more like “to stake one’s life on” or “to put oneself into the hands of.” This is also the construction we have in John 3:16 when it says “everyone believing *into* him should not be destroyed, but should have eternal life.”

There are no manuscript variants of either verse that alter the prepositional construction. Verse 15 has “believe in” and verse 16 has “believe into.” So what kind of faith is actually needed in order to have eternal life? Is mere confidence in Jesus having been lifted up like the serpent Moses lifted up enough? Or are we asked for more, for a complete commitment of life to Jesus, which results in a complete commitment of eternal life to us?

Let me suggest the logic of the serpent story already implies that the “believe in” of verse 15 has the force of “believe into.” Verse 16 merely clarifies and underscores that.

Here’s why. What was at stake in the serpent story was life and death. The promise from God was that those who had been bitten by poisonous serpents and would go to Moses, against whom they had complained bitterly, and gaze upon the bronze serpent he had attached to a large pole as an indicator of the serpents that had bitten them would be healed, saved from certain death. To have enough confidence (believing in) to go to look at the serpent lifted up, then, was literally an act of staking one’s life on the message that this action would bring deliverance from death. In a similar way, anyone who was looking at Jesus when he was lifted up on a crucifix and still believing in him was, in effect, taking their own life into their hands for his sake, or, more accurately, staking their life on him.

In reality, few people witnessed the death of Jesus on the crucifix. But all of us are invited to stake our lives on him, to believe into him, all the same.

END SIDEBAR

PLANNING NOTES

Second Sunday in Lent Living Our Baptismal Calling: “ACCEPT”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

Living Our Baptismal Calling: “ACCEPT”

Today is the second Sunday in the Lenten series, “Living the Baptismal Calling.” Today’s focus is on the second baptismal question: “Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”

Today is also the beginning of Daylight Saving Time for most of the United States.

Two weeks from today marks the first time we observe what we now call “UMCOR Sunday.” The former designation was One Great Hour of Sharing. The title was changed by General Conference in 2016 to reflect that all funds raised for this day in United Methodist churches are specifically to offset the administrative costs of the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

March

All Month

[Women’s History Month](#)

March 12

[Daylight Saving Time Begins](#) (USA)

March 26

[UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9

[Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday

April 13

[Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14

[Good Friday](#)

April 15

[Holy Saturday \(Full Twitter script with audio links\) #holysat17](#)

[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16

[Easter Sunday](#)

April 23

[Festival of God’s Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25

World Malaria Day

April 30

[Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

May

All Month	<u>Christian Home Month</u> <u>Asian Pacific American Heritage Month</u>
May 4	<u>National Day of Prayer (USA)</u>
May 5	<u>May Friendship Day</u>
May 8-14	<u>Christian Family Week</u>
May 14	<u>Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day (USA)</u>
May 21	<u>Heritage Sunday</u>
May 24	<u>Aldersgate Day</u>
May 25	<u>Ascension Day</u>
May 28	<u>Ascension Sunday (if transferred)</u>
May 29	<u>Memorial Day (USA)</u>
June	
June 4	<u>Day of Pentecost (Easter Season Concludes)</u>
June 11	<u>Trinity Sunday, Peace with Justice Sunday</u> New Series Begins: TBA
June 18	<u>Father's Day (USA)</u>
June 19	<u>Juneteenth</u>
July	
July 4	<u>Independence Day</u>

For Your Planning Team: Living Our Baptismal Calling "ACCEPT"

In This Series

This past Sunday and during this week, you've set the pattern for the life and work of your congregation throughout this season. You gather in worship on Sunday to hear and respond to one of the baptismal questions grounded in the Scriptures and then continue with at least two additional opportunities for follow up on that baptismal calling (one on one and in formation group gatherings) throughout the week. You may also have had a Courageous Conversation event that models and helps advance work on what it means to be "in union with the church which Christ opens to people of **all** ages, nations, and races."

Keep these patterns going strong this week and in the weeks to come!

Today

Today's gospel account of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, "a person sent from the Pharisees," sets an important backdrop for the work involved in living out the second baptismal question, "Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?" Accepting the freedom and power God offers requires something of us. Jesus first tells Nicodemus it requires being "born anew." Today, we might call it "a reboot."

Nicodemus cannot accept this metaphor. It makes no sense to him. Part of the good news of this encounter is that Nicodemus's inability to accept the first metaphor didn't stop Jesus from trying to offer him something more. Jesus offers a second metaphor, the story of Moses lifting up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. We don't see how Nicodemus responds to this at this point in John's narrative. But it seems both this second story and the subsequent events in his

own life and the life of Jesus led him to become a disciple of Jesus (see John 19:39).

Accepting the freedom and power God gives is the first part of this week's challenge. The second part is using that freedom and power for the purposes for which God gives it: to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.

As last week's service did, this week's service offers multiple opportunities for worshipers to embrace the challenges of this baptismal question. Once again, the question is built into the acts of entrance, this time following a processional singing of two songs that embody both verbs of the question (*accept, resist*). "Wade in the Water" calls us to accept, to welcome, to come on in. "Go Down, Moses" reminds us of our calling to use that power to resist and offers us the model of one who has done so, placing the singing congregation in the place of those who cheer on his acts of resistance.

We pick it up again in the response to the sermon in which, like last week, people are invited to write down in two cards how they will seek to accept and resist during the coming week. Individuals keep one card for themselves and give the other to another to check in with later during the week. Again, too, we've built the baptismal question into the framing of both the prayers of the people and the dismissal. We'll continue to do so throughout Lent.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Second Sunday in Lent](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino

FORMATION GROUP NOTES

You established a basic pattern for your formation groups last week. The basic structure of the meeting is gathering, prayer, teaching/sharing, and blessing/sending. It's important to continue that basic pattern today and in the weeks to come. Setting into a regular pattern will help your group gain comfort with one another and focus on the reasons you gather.

This week's focus is on the second baptismal question: "Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?"

Here's a suggested agenda:

1. Brief, informal time of gathering (10 minutes or so) with snacks to share.
2. Formal gathering and prayer with participants seated in a circle in chairs or around a table-- with requests for prayer for the coming week (10 minutes) and prayer led by the group leader or unison in the group. However you chose to share requests and pray last week, do the same this week.

Again, one practice I've found useful in leading such groups, especially when prayer out loud may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for some in the group, is immediately after a person shares, the whole group pauses, then says in unison, "Into your hands, O God,

we commend our sister/brother/sibling(s) Name(s).” Proceed to the next person and repeat until all who wish to offer requests for prayer have had the opportunity to do so.

3. Teaching and Testimony-- (35 minutes)-- For this week, there are two verbs to focus on (*accept* and *resist*), and the first verb (*accept*) has two actions (*accept freedom* and *accept power*). Once again, give about ten minutes to each of these (*accept freedom*, *accept power*, *resist*), with one to two minutes for brief teaching (see below) and the remaining time for sharing how each is working on each one, how each has exercised each one, what has happened because each did, and how each seeks to improve.

Before these three ten-minute blocks, set aside five minutes to talk about specific practices that enable or embody acceptance and, in particular, the practice of prayer. See TEACHING 1, below, for more detail.

4. Blessing and Sending--Gather in a circle or huddle, lay hands on one another, one by one, and pray over each in unison: “X, may you continue to grow in Christ in the days ahead.” (5 minutes). Thank all for coming, and send the group out to continue to grow.

TEACHING 1: PRAYER AS A MEANS OF GRACE FOR PRACTICING ACCEPTANCE

If you have used the model of prayer I have suggested above (“Into your hands, O God, we commend our sister/brother/sibling Name”), you have already been approaching prayer as a means of grace for practicing the acceptance of the freedom and power God desires to give us and allow to flow through us to bless all creatures and all creation. In such prayer, we are not asking God to do a particular thing. We are not ordering God around or even offering a wish list for how we’d prefer something take place. We are instead commending people and situations into God’s care, however God in God’s freedom and power may seek or be able to work.

Praying in this way embodies our acceptance that God is the source of the freedom and power and love we and the whole world most need. In this simple act of commendation, we also experience a particular kind of connection. We offer those we love into the hands of the One who is Love. We give up any pretension of knowing or controlling what happens next. To trust Love in love is all, and it is enough.

This dynamic act of trust embodied in such prayer is a gift to us from God. As Christians, we learn and teach prayer as a means of grace by which we let go the illusion of control and instead open ourselves to receive the freedom and power God gives through this simple and power-filled means of communion between Love, the beloved, and those we all love and commend to Love.

TEACHING 2: ACCEPTING FREEDOM

Part of what seemed to “blow Nicodemus’s mind” about what Jesus shared with him is something he said in a verse you may not have read on Sunday morning. “The wind blows wherever it wants to, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it

came from or where it's going next. That's how it is with everyone who is born from the Spirit." (John 3:8). The notion that the Holy Spirit may be this free and unpredictable, like the wind ("wind" and "spirit" are the same word in both Greek and Hebrew) was generally accepted by religious leaders among the Jewish people. The notion that people, *generally*, might be given a similar level of freedom to speak and act by the Holy Spirit, however, was radical. One might expect such freedom for those very select few who were known as prophets. But not for everyone.

Yet here is Jesus, saying it's not only available for everyone, but it's reality for everyone who is "born of the Spirit."

This is why Paul also writes, "Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Where are the places in your lives where you currently find yourself bound or muted and so seek or need to seek the freedom God gives you? What has happened when you have exercised that freedom this week? How might we help you experience and use that freedom better?

TEACHING 3: ACCEPTING POWER

When you are set free on the inside, you may find you are also given power to act on behalf of yourself and others in ways you had not done before. John 1:12 (not in our reading today at all, but lying behind it) says, "As many as received him [Jesus], he gave them power (authority) to become the children of God, to all those believing into his name." And in Acts 1:8, we have these words from Jesus, "But you will receive power (the usual word for power) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." When we believe into Jesus, or when we experience this "new birth," as mentioned in our reading this Sunday, we receive both power (the ability to act) and authority (the capacity our authorization to act) as children of God in the world.

The notion that all disciples of Jesus are given both authority and power to act as God's children in the world may be an unfamiliar notion, even to longtime churchgoers. We may have heard language like this primarily in the context of ordinations, where, after the bishop lays hands on the head of the candidate to ask the Holy Spirit to be poured upon him/her for the particular office or work (as deacon or elder), the bishop then lays hands on the newly ordained person's hands and says, "Take authority..."

What we may miss is that what we are doing in ordination is simply an extension of what God has already done for us in baptism. All of us who have been born of water and the Spirit have also been given both the *ability* to act in the world (power) and the *authorization* to do so (authority) by God.

We may be a bit squeamish about exercising this power and authority. But we oughtn't be. We may be afraid to act lest we use it poorly. Let me assure you, yes, sometimes, if not often, we do use it poorly. But it's still given to us. And we can teach and support one another in ways to use this power and authority more and more constructively and

effectively over time.

So how have you used your power and authority as children of God this week? What happened when you did? And how might we help one another do this better?

TEACHING 4: FREEDOM AND POWER... TO RESIST

The freedom and power we are given by God is not primarily to make ourselves feel better or even be better. The primary purpose of the freedom and power God gives us is to enable us to join *God's* resistance against everything that destroys or corrupts the creatures of God and the creation God has made.

In the "[Baptismal Tai-Chi](#)," I teach seminary students and participants in the "Living the Covenant" retreats the embodiment of "resist" is to face toward the east (toward the risen Christ or toward the front of the worship space), left foot forward, and leaning forward, both hands lowered and pushing back behind the body.

We continue moving forward, following the way of Christ. We have already repented (turned away) from the way of sin. But evil still exists and pursues us and others. So, facing Christ, and moving forward in him, we continue to push back, to resist, the evil that might draw us back or harm others along the way, in whatever forms it presents itself.

The freedom and power we receive from God enable us to continue to move Christward, forward in the way of God's kingdom. They also enable us to resist, precisely as we look toward Christ. Think of Peter walking on the water in the storm. As long as he looked toward Christ, he did not sink. The moment he let his attention wander to the howling of the wind and the power of the waves, he began to sink.

So how have you done this week in looking toward Christ, source of freedom and power, and then channeling that power to resist evil, injustice, and oppression? What happened when you did? And how can we help you do this better?

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

THIRD SUNDAY

IN LENT:

CONFESS

March 19, 2017

FULL SERVICE

Lent 3 CONFESS

Do you confess



Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as Lord, in union with the church Christ opens to people of all ages, nations, and races? By the grace given you, will you remain faithful member(s) of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representative(s) in the world?

ENTRANCE

"All Who Are Thirsty"
"Tear Down the Walls"

[CCLI #2489542](#)
[CCLI #5372144](#) OR

"Jesus Shall Reign," st 1-3
"Fill My Cup, Lord," st 1-2
"Jesus Shall Reign," st 4-5

UMH 157
W&S 3093
UMH 157

Pastor (standing by the font):

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,
put your whole trust in his grace,
and promise to serve him as Lord,
in union with the church Christ opens
to people of all ages, nations, and races?

And by the grace given you

will you remain faithful members of Christ's holy church
and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?

**People: We do,
and we we will continue to do so
personally,
in our families and small groups,
and together,
by attending upon all the ordinances of God.**

WORD AND RESPONSE

Solo/Choir/Band "Come to the Water," Refrain W&S 3114

Reading

John 4:5-15, 25-29, 39-42
Translation by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Reader 1: Narrator

So Jesus comes into the city of Samaria called Sychar, near the region which Jacob gave to Joseph, his son. The well of Jacob was there.

Worn out from travelling the roads, he was sitting down upon the well. It was about the sixth hour.

A woman from Samaria comes to draw water. Jesus says to her:

Reader 2: Jesus

Give me to drink.

Reader 1:

(His disciples had gone off into the city to purchase some food).

So the Samaritan woman says to him:

Congregation:

How is that that you, a Jewish person, are requesting from me, a Samaritan woman, something to drink?

Reader 1:

(Jewish people do not associate or share dishes with Samaritans).

Jesus answered and said to her:

Reader 2:

If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who is saying to you, "Give me to drink," you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.

Congregation:

Sir, you do not have anything to draw with, and the shaft is deep. So from where do you have living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this shaft, and who himself drank from it along with his his sons and his flocks?

Reader 2:

Everyone drinking from this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks from the water I will give them will not thirst [from now] into the age to come, because the water I will give them shall become for them a well of water leaping up into eternal life.

Congregation:

Sir, give me this water so I will neither thirst nor come back here to draw.

Solo/Choir/Band "Come to the Water," Stanza 1

W&S 3114

Congregation:

I know Messiah is coming, the one the Hellenists call Christ. Whenever he comes, he will announce everything to us.

Reader 2:

I am he, the one speaking to you.

Reader 1:

Just then, his disciples came, and they were astonished that he was speaking with a woman. Yet no one said, "What are you looking for?" or "Why are you talking with *her*?"

(All) "Come to the Water," St. 2

W&S 3114

Reader 1:

So this woman let go of her water jar, and went away into the city, and starts saying to the people there:

Congregation:

Come with me. See the person who has told me everything I have done! Mightn't this be the Christ?

(All) "Come to the Water," Pre-Chorus (2X, up to first "love") W&S 3114

Reader 1:

From that town many of the Samaritans believed into [Jesus] because of the word of the woman testifying, "He told me everything I've done!" So when Samaritans came to him, asking him to stay there among them, he stayed there two days. And many more believed through his word. And they said to the woman:

Congregation:

It's no longer because of what you said that we believe. For we have heard and we know that this man is truly the savior of the world.

(All) "Come to the Water," Coda W&S 3114

Sermon

"Confess"

Call to Confess, Trust, Serve, Unite, and Represent

People may be invited to write on cards at least one example of confessing Jesus Christ as Savior, trusting fully in his grace, serving him as Lord, and uniting with people of all ages, nations, and races to serve as Christ's representatives they will commit to pursue during the coming week. Invite them to make two copies of these items, and give one copy to one other person with whom they will check in during the coming week to share progress and offer mutual support. As they live the call this week, ask them to document times when they've successfully acted in each area, as well as times when they've failed and needed to ask for more help. Midweek formation groups will be another opportunity to check in, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

Music during Call to Confess

"Beautiful Things"
"O Church of God, United"

[CCLI #5665521](#) OR
UMH 547

Prayers of the People

Confessing Jesus Christ as Savior of the World, we let go our false hopes of salvation in any other name, and all false saviors, and we pray for your saving love and power to be revealed:

In all persons kept in poverty or slavery,

**in all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors,
in all who face addiction of any kind,
and in all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Putting our whole trust in Christ's grace, we forgive those who have harmed us, we bless those who have persecuted us, and we seek mercy, peace, justice, and reconciliation for all people and all of your creation, and we pray for all empowered to seek or impede the freedom, safety, and dignity of every human being and the good of all creation:

**For leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life;
and for all who work to sustain and protect our lives
as military, civilian workers, and first responders;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Serving Jesus as Lord who unites us with people of all ages, nations, and races, and sends us as his representatives into the world, we seek healing and wholeness for all people, and we pray:

**with families, friends, and neighbors,
near and far, like us and different from us;
with all who need your healing power,
and for all who offer healing through their skill and presence;
and for all whom we have harmed by our action or inaction;**

Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Pastor:

Receive the prayers of your people, most merciful God.
In your compassion, forgive our sins,
and drive us to lives of faithful service
in and through the one and diverse community of your church.
through Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Silence

Pastor:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

People:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God! Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Pastor:

Forgiven, restored, and united with Christ,
let us offer the peace of Christ to one another
and our gifts to God.

The people exchange the peace of Christ as the offering is collected. If Communion is celebrated, the gifts are presented during the offertory music. If Communion is not celebrated, the gifts collected are presented during the Act of Thanksgiving.

Music during the Offering and Peace

“We Are One”	CCLI# 7040700	OR
“Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather”	UMH 552	

Act of Thanksgiving (if Communion is not celebrated)

Thank You Lord (2x)	UMH 84
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The pastor, a deacon, or a lay leader offers these words of thanks between each stanza, and the congregation responds by singing.

Jesus, you have given us living water, so we need never thirst again. (All) “Thank You, Lord”	UMH 84
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You know everything about us and still draw near to us! “Thank You, Lord”	UMH 84
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Your love inspires us to tell everyone we know about you. “Thank You, Lord”	UMH 84
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Your word and your presence draw all people to you. “Thank You, Lord”	UMH 84
--------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------

Your Spirit sends us into places we’d never think to go. “Thank You, Lord” (2X)	UMH 84
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OR

The Great Thanksgiving	BOW 60-61
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Music during Communion

"Welcome"

W&S 3152 OR

"Christ, from Whom All Blessings Flow"

UMH 550

Thanksgiving after Communion*Pastor and People:***Jesus, thank you!**

**You have fed us with yourself
that we may be united in you,
who breaks down every dividing wall of hostility
and makes of your church one body
from every language, people, nation and tongue.
In the power of the Holy Spirit,
send us forth as servants to all,
and representatives of your saving love
wherever we go. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH*Invite the congregation to face the back of the sanctuary, toward the exits.***Hymn/Song**

"Draw the Circle Wide"

W&S 3154 OR

"Go to the World"

W&S 3158

Deacon or Lay Leader (from the back of the worship space)

Go into a world that offers many paths to short-lived pleasure.

We confess Jesus Christ as Savior.

Go into homes, workplaces, and communities with little mercy.

We put our whole trust in his grace.

Go into systems that demand your allegiance, or else.

We promise to serve Jesus Christ as Lord.Go into social media, meetings, and other groups
that will seek to pit you

against other sisters and brothers in Christ

because of how old they are, where they are from, or who they are.

We are united and will stay united**with people of every age, nation, and race****in Christ's holy church,****and represent Christ in the world.***Pastor*

Go then, with the blessing of our Triune God.

We go to live our baptismal calling. Amen.

Postlude

Variations on Draw the Circle Wide

MUSIC NOTES

All Who Are Thirsty

Usually an invitational hymn is placed after the sermon, but this hymn is both an invitation for people to come to the “fountain” and the “stream of life” and an invitation to open up to the presence of the holy with the chorus, “Come, Lord Jesus, come” and “Holy Spirit, come.” Repeat the chorus numerous times to create a prayer atmosphere. This song is easily accompanied by piano and/or guitar, with or without a full band.

Tear Down the Walls

This song by Australia’s Hillsong speaks to the walls to be torn down between people, which relates to the barrier broken down this week between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. In singing this song, the congregation will hopefully be inspired to share their faith by dismantling barriers in their own lives. The original key is too high for most congregations, so I recommend singing this selection in A Major. Either use a full band or keep it simple with a simple accompaniment pattern on piano or guitar. As with other modern options, do not play the melody on the piano. Allow the voice to lead the people. If this is unfamiliar to your congregation, find a way to teach it (i.e., teaching and repeating the pre-chorus, “I don’t have to see it to believe it,” for something to latch onto every time it returns in the music).

Jesus Shall Reign

“Jesus Shall Reign” is a classic hymn text by the eighteenth-century hymn writer (and one of Charles Wesley’s contemporaries) Isaac Watts. Jesus is praised for the endless presence of his reign: “People and realms of every tongue,” “where’er the sun does its successive journeys run.” We propose the singing of stanzas 1-3 before pairing it with the next hymn, “Fill My Cup, Lord.” DUKE STREET is a bold and confident tune for this text, but another option could be TRURO (at least until stanza 5, with the word “honors,” which doesn’t fit quite as well as it does in DUKE STREET). [History of Hymns](#)

Fill My Cup, Lord

We encourage using stanzas 1 and 2 this week as a way of expressing the personal experience of Jesus’ reign in concert with the global and cosmic nature of his reign in the previous hymn. Because of this pairing, I recommend singing this hymn in the key of G to provide a seamless and sensible transition between selections. Yes, this makes the melody quite low in places, but it is still workable. If you do not have *Worship & Song* in your church, but you do have access to one book, encourage a soloist to sing the stanzas and invite the congregation to join on the refrain, which can also be found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, No. 641. [Hymn Study](#)

Come to the Water

If you have a band and praise team, I promise they will love you if you choose this selection that, when looking at the songwriters, seems to be the “We Are the World” of modern worship music. The song is very singable and accessible, but it also has an exciting drive that is not found in many hymns or modern songs. The pre-chorus (“Oh,

let justice roll like rivers”) builds to a climax at the opening of the chorus, or refrain, that will inspire even the most timid singers to sing boldly. Because of the way it is divided up in this week’s service, you may feel the need to sing more of it at the conclusion of the reading, and we invite you to do so if you feel led. Within the scriptural parts of the liturgy, you may choose to sing it more reflectively, but be sure to follow it up with an energetic reprise of the pre-chorus and chorus. The original key is C, which is far too high for congregations to sing. I recommend singing in F (as in *Worship & Song*) or G.

Beautiful Things

“You make beautiful things out of the dust” is a reminder of what God can do in the midst of our frailty and brokenness. Your congregation may already be familiar with this song through a vacation Bible school curriculum, but there is a suggestion to be made if you are only familiar with the recording by Gungor. You will notice in his recording that he eventually takes the chorus up one octave to a range unattainable by almost all congregations. My simple recommendation is to sing in the key of D and continue singing the melody in its octave. To simulate the jump Gungor makes, a male voice could sing lead on the melody until the jump, at which point a female voice takes over. This will achieve the same octave leap, but typically people do not strain when they hear a female voice singing in a lower range. If this leap is not important in the worship dynamic you envision, feel free to sing in a lower range throughout. Accompaniment is best supported with a piano, guitar, or band.

O Church of God, United

Confessing Jesus Christ as our Savior “in union with the church” means that especially our act of singing together is an act of unity as we all become proclaimers in the holy act of hymn singing. This hymn highlights the way we are united in our love of Christ, “though creeds and tongues may differ.” ELLACOMBE serves as an ideal tune for this message, though it is also appropriate to sing the text to AURELIA, which will then evoke the thematic nature of the hymn, “The Church’s One Foundation” and connect the two together. Accompany with organ, piano, and even brass if you have access to those instruments in your community. This joyous tune is effectively accompanied by handbells as well, and several arrangements of the ELLACOMBE tune for handbells can also be found [here](#). Sing this hymn boldly! [History of Hymns](#)

We Are One

The City Harmonic has created this song of unity that seems to resemble the “One for all/all for one” theme of *The Three Musketeers*. It has a very accessible melody, as long as it is lowered from its original key. The ideal key for congregational singing is F or G, but no higher. If the selection is played and sung by a band and praise team with no intention of congregational singing, the key may be whatever is accessible for the vocalists and instrumentalists in your ensemble. Possible accompaniments range from full band to piano or guitar.

Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather

This haunting Japanese text and melody become a powerful statement of unity when sung in worship. Non-western harmony is often difficult for westerners to grasp,

so it might be helpful to reinforce the melody with a solo wind instrument to double the unison voices throughout. Choir members need to lead the congregational singing. However, if the intent is not to sing this with the entire gathered body, a choir, small ensemble, or soloist can also present this well. A double bass and cello would be a beautiful addition to play the bass notes together, and a flute or violin would be best on the melody. If these are not available, an organ or piano is also an effective means of supporting the accompaniment. Also feel free to add a handbell random ring on a pentatonic scale (Bb, C, D, F, G). [History of Hymns](#)

Thank You, Lord

This gospel chorus must be sung passionately at a slow pace. If able, allow a choir to sing in four-part harmony to accompany the congregation, and be sure to put space between “thank” and “you,” as written by William Farley Smith in measure 7. If you have a soloist who is confident about improvising over the congregation, encourage her/him to sing a very short introduction every time before the congregation begins singing. Don’t be afraid to use piano, organ, bass, and drums all at the same time to make the singing of this brief chorus authentic and full. This song is very accessible, however, to congregations of all sizes and abilities and should be considered for this act of thanksgiving. View and download the score for “Thank You, Lord” [here](#).

Welcome

Laurie Zelman and Mark Miller’s hymn, “Welcome,” gives us what Laurence Hull Stookey has referred to as the “intersection of time and eternity” (*Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church*, p. 17) by connecting the past, present, and future with the eternal time of the reign of God. This hymn is rich with imagery of the table being prepared, shared, and extended into the world. If your congregation is unfamiliar with this hymn, my suggestion would be to teach it over time by asking them to sing the refrain (and taking the time to teach it to them before worship) the first time you encounter it during the Eucharist. Continue singing it in following weeks as you gather around the table, and have soloists sing the stanzas. Over time, the congregation will associate the hymn with the Eucharist and will be able to sing it as they build their liturgical memory. When accompanying on piano, which in this case is not easy, I would recommend not playing the melody because it can easily complicate the singing. Improvise on the chords of the song and allow the voices to carry the melody.

Christ, from Whom All Blessings Flow

Charles Wesley addresses our unity with Christ and one another in a hymn that recalls Scripture from 1 Corinthians 12:4-31 and Galatians 3:27-28. Every person within the body of Christ is uniquely gifted in ways that, when partnered with people possessing other gifts, allows the body to find its fullness in ministry to the world. The phrase “all in all” is used twice to emphasize both the Lordship (“Thou, O Christ, art all in all”) and servanthood (“thou who fillest all in all”) of Christ. CANTERBURY is a beautiful tune that is best accompanied on organ or piano, but the harmony is able to be simplified enough that a guitar could also strum along with the other instruments.

[History of Hymns](#)

Draw the Circle Wide

Gordon Light and Mark Miller have collaborated together on this modern classic, which is increasingly popular with adult and youth choirs from its publication as an anthem from Abingdon Press. It is found in hymn format in *Worship & Song*, and it is especially poignant when paired close to “Welcome” (as recommended above) because the imagery of the open table is expanded here as the congregation prepares to leave the worship space. If you have a choir in your church, be sure they rehearse this well enough in advance to learn all four parts on the choruses. Invite the congregation to embody the song, too, by forming a circle inside and/or outside the space and joining hands, always leaving one space open for someone to be welcomed into the fold. This song can easily be accompanied by piano, small instrumental ensemble (any combination of piano, guitar, bass, light percussion, or wind/string instruments), or full band and praise team.

Go to the World

Sylvia G. Dunstan is widely known for her hymns, “You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd” and “All Who Hunger,” among numerous others. “Go to the World” embodies the great commission found in Matthew 18:16-20 and serves as an effective call to discipleship and mission. If your congregation has sung “For All the Saints” as many other churches have on All Saints Day, they will be able to sing this hymn with excitement and fervor. By singing “Go to the world,” they will both recall the words of Jesus from The Great Commission, and they will also challenge one another by instructing one another, as the body of Christ, to go “preach the cross where Christ’s renews life’s worth.” The classic SINE NOMINE tune by monumental composer Ralph Vaughan Williams is best accompanied on organ. Pull out all the stops for the fourth stanza!

PREACHING NOTES

March 19 Lent 3: Confess

In an encounter with a woman at a well in Samaria, Jesus confesses who he is, the Messiah, and she not only embraces it, but leads others to make the same confession.

[John 4:5-52](#)

I suggest that you begin your sermon by speaking directly to those who are Christians, who are professing members of The United Methodist Church, and who have already been baptized into the faith. Ask these folks a few questions.

- *Why are you here today?*

- *Why are you a Christian?*
- *Why do you follow Jesus?*
- *Why have you confessed Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promised to serve him as your Lord in union with the church that Christ has opened to all people of all ages, nations, and races.*
- *Why have you committed yourself, according to the grace given in you, to be a faithful member of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representatives in the world?*
- *How are you living out this vow made at your baptism?*

After recognizing this is too many questions to think about, let alone answer, even if you give your listeners a few minutes to consider them, you will understand that these questions take a lifetime to answer. Furthermore, our answers come not so much from what we say, but from how we live. Nevertheless, it is important to put the questions before us, especially as we consider the story of the Samaritan woman alongside our second baptismal vow:

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as Lord, in union with the church Christ opens to people of all ages, nations, and races? Will you commit yourself, according to the grace given in you, to be a faithful member of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representative in the world?

I have always been amazed by this story about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. Although many scholars have portrayed her as not just uneducated, but the worst kind of sinner—divorced multiple times, of loose morals, and a follower of the wrong religion—I think it is important to notice how intelligent she comes across in this conversation with Jesus. She really holds her own! As Bonnie Thurston notes in [*Women in the New Testament: Questions and Commentary*](#) (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998):

The Samaritan woman is, in fact, one of the most theologically informed persons in the Fourth Gospel. She knows the regulations about ritual purity (verse 9), ancestral traditions of Israel (verse 12), the necessity to worship at a valid temple

(verses 19-20), and the expectation of a Messiah (verse 25). She is, in short, conversant in Samaritan theology [which is not surprising since, unlike Jews, Samaritans educated religiously both male and female children], and Jesus takes her as seriously as a discussion partner as he did Nicodemus in the preceding chapter (Thurston, pp. 83-84).

Thurston proposes that this encounter brings to a climax a series of conversations with a number of different people in John's gospel that show individuals progressively living *into* their understanding of who Jesus is. For Thurston, the Samaritan woman serves as the climax of these encounters: the fullest and most confident example of a true believer. Not only does she hold her own in a difficult and complex conversation, but in contrast to Nicodemus, who comes to Jesus under the cover of darkness, she comes to Jesus at noontime, out in the open, at a public well, and in the full light of day!

And while other religious authorities, including Nicodemus, whom we talked about last week, are consistently skeptical about who Jesus might be, this woman comes not only to have faith in Jesus Christ, but to go public with her experience. John reports that after this encounter, she immediately heads to her village where she confesses to others that she has met the long-awaited Messiah. In doing so, she becomes the world's very first Christian missionary. By the end of the story, we learn that because of her testimony about what has happened to her and "because of her word," others have come to believe in the good news of Jesus Christ!

So what convinced her? What caused this woman to confess Jesus as her Savior, put her whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as her Lord?

Part of what convinced her, no doubt, is that Jesus knew not just her life story, but what was in her heart, and this knowledge did not cause him to reject her or turn away from her. But the more compelling thing, it seems to me, is that he offers her living water that will not just quench her thirst temporarily; it will quench her thirst eternally.

Living water. What is this living water that changed the Samaritan woman's life forever?

Last November I was invited to speak at a preaching education event being held by the Northeastern District of the Iowa Conference. The event was on a Saturday. Since I had arrived early in the afternoon on Friday, my host and driver, Dr. Scott Meador, who is the pastor at the First United Methodist Church in Independence, Iowa, took me on a tour of how United Methodism is being lived out in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Specifically, Scott wanted me to learn about the Matthew 25 ministry.

BEGIN SIDEBAR

[Matthew 25](#) was founded in 2006 by two brothers, Clint Twedt-Ball and Courtney Ball, who at the time of its founding were both United Methodist ministers in the Iowa Annual Conference. Clint continues his work in extension ministry, providing primary leadership for Matthew 25 today. Courtney remains involved, but has transitioned to other expressions of his witness in ministry, especially through writing and video production.

The ministry of Matthew 25 occurs in three major areas of community revitalization: neighborhood building, food education and youth empowerment.

Matthew 25 is a place that bridges many traditional barriers in society. Matthew 25 programs involve people of all incomes, races, backgrounds, and areas of the city. Matthew 25 works with people and institutions from the business and nonprofit sector to churches, places of higher learning, and more. This mix of people adds vibrancy and creativity to solving difficult, long-term, challenging issues. You can learn more at www.hub25.org or give them a call at 319-362-2214.

END SIDEBAR

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, is an interesting city. It is home to many descendants of Czechoslovakia and is the location of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library. It is also home to the African-American Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa and the Masonic Library and Museum. In addition, Cedar Rapids has played an important role in the Muslim culture of the United States. It is the location for the National Muslim Cemetery, unique in that all the graves face Mecca, and the Mother Mosque of America, the longest operating mosque in North America, dedicated in 1934.

Muslim immigrants, primarily from Lebanon and Syria, have lived in the area continuously since 1895.

Cedar Rapids is named for the Cedar River, which snakes its way through the center of the city. The headwaters for the river are in Dodge County, Minnesota. From there, the river runs south through eastern Iowa, on a roughly parallel path with the Iowa River, until the two rivers come together and eventually flow into the mighty Mississippi River. The Cedar River has served as an important commercial waterway, transporting goods from cities planted along its path, since the mid-1800's for settlers from Europe, and much further back in history for native American peoples. In this way, the waters of the Cedar River have given a great deal of life and prosperity not just to Cedar Rapids, but to other port cities that were built along its banks.

Downtown Cedar Rapids, located primarily on the eastern bank of the river, is home to many thriving industries, especially those related to grain processing. A large Quaker Oats mill sits prominently on the east bank, north of the city center. General Mills and Cargill also have facilities there, as well as several other significant companies. It is a thriving heartland city that is now enjoying a resurgence, thanks in part to massive revitalization efforts that have come about because of a natural disaster.

In 2008 historic flooding devastated the city of Cedar Rapids. For three solid weeks, communities on both sides of the Cedar River struggled to cope with rising waters. The river eventually crested at over 31 feet, surpassing all previous floods on record. 1,126 city blocks were left underwater on both banks. 7,749 properties were evacuated, 5,900 of which were homes and 310 of which were city public facilities (information from [Wikipedia](#)).

Homes in the neighborhoods located on the western bank were generally of lesser value in the real estate market than neighborhoods further out from the city center, or on the eastern bank. Some were rental properties; others were owner-occupied. People who had been struggling already lost everything in the flood, and many had little means with which to replace their basic possessions, let alone rebuild their homes. The building that housed Matthew 25 ministries itself had to be demolished following the flood.

Only two years into their mission to revitalize this struggling city community, the founders of Matthew 25 faced a tough decision. Should they relocate to a different part of the city, or should they remain and rebuild alongside their neighbors after the devastation caused by the waters of the Cedar River? They chose the latter.

According to the website, after founding the ministry in 2006 “to help strengthen and elevate neighborhoods on the west side of Cedar Rapids, Iowa,” only two years later, Matthew 25 was forced by the shared disaster to reach out to their neighbors in new and unexpected ways. They turned flood waters into living waters by partnering “with other organizations to invest more than \$6 million to empower people to rebuild 25 blocks and renew their neighborhoods – Block by Block.” Their efforts to respond to the changing needs of their neighborhood, and especially to a natural disaster, did not go unnoticed. “The Block by Block program has been recognized statewide and nationally as a model for disaster recovery and neighborhood revitalization. More than 250 families were able to move back into their homes because of the work of Matthew 25.”

Not only did Matthew 25 help to rebuild people’s homes after the flood, but they began new programs specifically geared to help their community continue to grow and revitalize in other ways. They built a tool-lending library so that people who needed tools lost in the flood to make their homes livable again could borrow what they needed to get the job done. They created Iowa’s first urban farm and the Cultivate Hope food program on abandoned lots where houses had to be torn down. They began reaching out to support and connect with young people from all of the different cultural, religious, and racial backgrounds who called their neighborhood home. They offered services to help their neighbors make their homes more energy efficient.

In sum, Matthew 25 responded to the devastating waters of the 2008 flood by pointing to the living water of grace and healing love offered through Jesus Christ.

What is the living water that Jesus provides? It is that which saves us. It is that which saves, especially, the least and the lost, the rejected and disenfranchised, the oppressed and suffering, who live among us.

Once we drink the living water Jesus offers, we can no longer be satisfied by what physical water alone provides, whether it be for economic gain brought about by proximity to the transportation that a river offers or our basic human need for relief from dehydration.

Physical water can only satisfy our physical thirsts.

The living water Jesus Christ provides satisfies our eternal thirst: “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:13b-14, NRSV).

As those who have, in our baptismal vows, confessed “Jesus Christ as our Savior, put our whole trust in his grace, and promised to serve him as Lord, in union with the church Christ opens to people of all ages, nations and races,” our experience of drinking the living water offered in Christ is the same as that of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at a well under the noonday sun all those generations ago. It is life changing. It is deeply satisfying in a way nothing else is.

Not only is our experience the same; our mission is the same as well. Once we have tasted the living water that has become in us a spring of water gushing up to eternal life, we become compelled to offer that water to others. How do we do that? By our testimony, both with our words and through our self-giving actions.

In his new booklet, *The Meaning of Baptism in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2017), author Mark Stamm makes a direct connection between our responsibility to the world made in our baptismal vows and the living water Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman at the well:

We take up the baptismal calling of the church to intercede for the world, and to continue to live more deeply into the mind of Christ. In the lifelong pilgrimage with the church begun in baptism, we discover again and again that our purpose in life is deeply tied up with giving ourselves in service to others. In baptism, we step

into the flow of living water, and in it we experience, now, already, a foretaste of heaven.

Stepping into the Living Water: On the Ritual Practice of Baptism

Jesus told a Samaritan woman he could offer her “living water.” He said, “those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty” (Jn. 4:13). When we receive this living water, says Jesus, our deepest needs are satisfied. More than that, initiated into the flow of living water, we become part of God’s blessing to the world, participants in that “spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Becoming a part of that gracious flow satisfies many of our deepest longings, for God created us to “give ourselves for others.”[1] Self-giving is at the heart of the life of the Trinity into which we are baptized. We are at once most deeply human and closest to God when we give ourselves in love.

[1] See the prayer after communion, “A Service of Word and Table I,” *UMBOW*, 39.

The good news is that the living water offered by Jesus Christ is available to all—Samaritan or Jew, Christian or Muslim, black or brown or white, female or male, slave or free, rich or poor, able-bodied or differently-abled, gay or straight or transgendered—it doesn’t matter. God’s grace is offered to all who will drink of it.

We who have drunk of this living water, we who have come to faith and who claim faith in Jesus Christ, can only testify to what drinking of the living water of Jesus Christ has done for us. We cannot give the living water of faith to others. But we can become part of God’s blessing in the world. We can join in God’s mission by giving ourselves in love. And we can commit ourselves anew, according to the grace given to us, to be representatives of Jesus Christ in the world, and, through our words and self-giving actions, point people to the only one who can give us the living water that we most need.

PLANNING NOTES

**Third Sunday in Lent
Living Our Baptismal Calling: “Confess”**

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

CONFESS

Today is the third Sunday in the Lenten series, “Living the Baptismal Calling.” Today’s focus is on the third and fifth baptismal questions: “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as Lord in union with the church which he has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?” and “By the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of Christ’s holy church and serve as Christ’s representatives in the world?”

Next Sunday marks the first time we observe what we now call “UMCOR Sunday.” The former designation was One Great Hour of Sharing. The title was changed by General Conference in 2016 to reflect that all funds raised for this day in United Methodist churches are specifically to offset the administrative costs of the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

March

All Month

March 26 [Women’s History Month](#)
[UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9

[Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday

April 13

[Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14

[Good Friday](#)

April 15

[Holy Saturday \(Full Twitter script with audio links\) #holysat17](#)

[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16

[Easter Sunday](#)

April 23

[Festival of God’s Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25

[World Malaria Day](#)

April 30

[Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

May

All Month

[Christian Home Month](#)

[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)

May 4

[National Day of Prayer \(USA\)](#)

May 5

[May Friendship Day](#)

May 8-14

[Christian Family Week](#)

May 14

[Festival of the Christian Home/Mother’s Day \(USA\)](#)

May 21

[Heritage Sunday](#)

May 24

[Aldersgate Day](#)

May 25

[Ascension Day](#)

May 28	<u>Ascension Sunday (if transferred)</u>
May 29	<u>Memorial Day (USA)</u>
June	
June 4	<u>Day of Pentecost (Easter Season Concludes)</u>
June 11	<u>Trinity Sunday, Peace with Justice Sunday</u>
	New Series Begins: TBA
June 18	<u>Father's Day (USA)</u>
June 19	<u>Juneteenth</u>
July	
July 4	<u>Independence Day</u>

For Your Planning Team: Living Our Baptismal Calling "ACCEPT"

In This Series

Your basic patterns for worship and formation should now be well set for this series. You gather in worship on Sunday to hear and respond to one of the baptismal questions, grounded in the Scriptures, and then continue with at least two additional opportunities for follow up on that baptismal calling (one on one, and in formation group gatherings) throughout the week. You may also have had two Sunday morning or midweek Courageous Conversation events that model and help advance work on what it means to be "in union with the church which Christ opens to people of **all** ages, nations, and races."

Keep these patterns going strong this week and in the weeks to come!

Today

Today's gospel account of the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob beautifully illustrates this week's baptismal questions in action. Simply by stopping to rest in Samaria, and then even more by talking with a woman from Samaria and offering her "living water," Jesus is modeling what it means to be part of his church that he opens to people of all ages, nations, and races.

She shows us the rest of the verbs of this week's questions at work. She confesses Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior. She puts her whole trust in his grace, because she has experienced his grace toward her, even though he knows all about her past and present. She serves him as Lord and represents him by becoming an evangelist to the people of the nearby village, and they begin to believe at first because of her confession, and then because Jesus agreed to stay among them two days longer and they got to know him.

Jesus unites us. We confess, trust, serve, and represent him.

Today's service models this in the way the reading is constructed. One reader narrates. Another says the words of Jesus. The whole congregation says the words of the woman and of the crowd.

As we have done throughout this series, this service provides four opportunities to encounter and respond to the baptismal question that underlies both worship and formation groups this week. Once again, after the opening song set, the pastor asks the congregation the baptismal

questions, and the congregation responds in assent, adding the corresponding elements from the General Rules (in this case, General Rule 3). In the response to the sermon, all are invited to write down in two cards how they will seek to confess, trust, serve, be united with others, and represent Christ during the coming week. Individuals keep one card for themselves and give the other to another to check in with later during the week. The baptismal question again also forms the frame of both the prayers of the people and the dismissal.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Third Sunday in Lent](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle: Myanmar, Thailand](#)

FORMATION GROUP NOTES

The patterns for the one-hour group meeting should continue as you have established them.

1. Brief, informal time of gathering (10 minutes) with snacks to share.
2. Formal gathering and prayer with people seated in a circle in chairs or around a table-- with requests for prayer for the coming week (10 minutes) and prayer led by the group leader or unison in the group. However you chose to share requests and pray last week, do the same this week.

Again, one practice I've found useful in leading such groups, especially when prayer out loud may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable for some in the group, is immediately after a person shares, the whole group pauses, then says in unison: "Into your hands, O God, we commend our sister/brother/sibling(s) Name(s)." Proceed to the next person and repeat until all who wish to offer requests for prayer have had the opportunity to do so.

3. Teaching and Testimony-- (35 minutes)-- For this week, there are five verbs to focus upon: *confess*, *trust*, *serve*, *be united*, and *represent*. This means you have about seven minutes for each verb. Plan to spend no more than two minutes teaching about each one (see below), and use the remaining time for sharing how each is working on each one, how each has exercised each one during the past week or recent past, what has happened because each did, and how each seeks to improve.
4. Blessing and Sending-- Gather in a circle or huddle, lay hands on one another, one by one, and pray over each in unison: "X, may you continue to grow in Christ in the days ahead." (5 minutes). Thank all for coming, and send the group out to continue to grow.

TEACHING 1: CONFESS

Our verb *confess* in English comes from Greek roots that mean literally "to speak together." This is part of why "confessions of faith" in worship are spoken in unison. We are all, literally, speaking our faith together.

The verb also means, by extension, *to agree*. To confess is to agree that what one is saying is true.

We are called to confess (to agree, to say together) that Jesus Christ is **Savior**. This is one of the earliest, and also one of the most dangerous, Christian confessions. During the period of the early church, until Christianity was recognized as one of the legal religions in the early fourth century, there was only one person to whom the title “Savior” (*Soter* in Greek, *Salvator* in Latin) applied in the Roman Empire: Caesar, the emperor. To proclaim anyone else by this title was literally an act of treason. Indeed, this, plus calling Jesus “Lord” (see Teaching 3) were often among the legal charges of treason brought against early Christians during times of persecution.

We confess-- we agree, and we say together-- that Jesus Christ is Savior, and there is no other. In so doing, we also agree and say together that his way of being Savior, by love and service and solidarity with the suffering rather than by conquest and suppression, is the only true way of being Savior that there is.

TEACHING 2: TRUST

As we discussed last week, disciples of Jesus are those who “believe *into*” him. That is, we do more than merely assent to a set of beliefs about him. We stake our lives on him and on the way he shows and leads us to live.

Here we make a pledge to “put our whole trust in” or, we might say, “believe into” his grace. We will do more than confess him as Lord. We will also stake our lives on mercy, being merciful as he is merciful in every way we can. This is part of what the Wesleys were pointing to, explicitly, in the second General Rule, where they and early Methodists pledged to do good “by being in every kind merciful after their power.” We are able to show mercy more and more as we trust more deeply in the mercy that has been shown toward us in Jesus Christ.

TEACHING 3: SERVE as LORD

The term Lord (*Kyrios* in Greek, *Dominus* in Latin) was, like Savior, a term reserved by the Roman Empire to refer exclusively to Caesar, the emperor. “Lord” as the Gentiles used that term meant “the one to whom all allegiance is ultimately due and who controls/dominates one’s life. Jesus was quite clear in his teaching about how his disciples were to offer leadership. It was not by “lording it over” others, as the empire did. It was by becoming servants of all, just as Jesus had given the example by taking the role of a servant to wash the disciples’ feet at his last meal with them (John 13:13-17).

So when we pledge to serve Jesus as Lord, we commit treason against all other powers, declaring sole allegiance to Jesus. And more than this, we pledge ourselves to his way of lordship in the world-- the way of service, especially among the least, the marginalized, the displaced, and the most targeted people among us.

TEACHING 4: BE UNITED

To confess Jesus as Savior, trust fully in his grace, and serve him as Lord is not a solo act. It is something we are called to do with and among people “from every tribe and tongue and people and ethnicity” (Revelation 4:9). We agree in today’s first question that we’ll be part of such a diverse and global community. We acknowledge (“By the grace given you, will you remain faithful members of Christ’s holy Church”) that this is not something we can keep doing ourselves, individually. We need God’s grace-- God’s love and mercy in action in our lives and the lives of others-- to keep us united in such a broad-flung diversity of people. So our pledge in the second question is more than “we’ll do our best to stay united.” Instead, it’s “we know we can’t do this in our own power, and we’ll trust God’s more than sufficient grace to make our unity real and lasting.”

TEACHING 5: REPRESENT

The idea captured in this verb (“serve as Christ’s representative, or, more simply, represent Christ) comes from the domain of diplomacy (as in an official representative of state). The [Urban Dictionary](#)’s top definition may say it better: “Go and be a good example to the others of your group or in your position.” We might very well paraphrase this less as a question (“Will you... serve as Christ’s representatives in the world?”) and more as a charge (Disciple of Jesus, represent, yo!) Show up. Speak for Jesus. Act for Jesus. Be what Jesus has taught you to be *with* that multinational, multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic, multi-*everything* people he calls his church.

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: NURTURE

FULL SERVICE

Lent 4 NURTURE

To parents and sponsors: Will you nurture these children/persons in Christ’s holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

To the congregation: Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?

ENTRANCE

“Amazing Grace” (My Chains Are Gone)
 “Beautiful Things” (stanza 3, chorus 1b twice)

W&S 3104 ([CCLI #4768151](#))
[CCLI# 5665521](#) OR

“Amazing Grace,” st 1-5

UMH 378

Pastor, from the font, to the congregation with all new members, newly baptized, those

preparing for baptism or professing membership, and those baptized or received into professing membership in the church within the past year.

Will you nurture one another,
in the Christian faith and life,
especially those of us who have come among you
during the past year?

**With God's help, we will proclaim the good news
and live according to the example of Christ.
We will surround these persons
with a community of love and forgiveness,
that they may grow in their service to others.
We will pray for them,
that they may be true disciples
who walk in the way that leads to life.**

“Beautiful Things” (chorus) reprise OR
“Amazing Grace”, stanza 6

WORD AND RESPONSE

John 9:1-12, 24-25, 35-41

Translated by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Reader 1: (Narrator)

And going along, Jesus saw a person blind from birth. And his disciples asked him:

Congregation:

Rabbi, who sinned? What it this man himself or his parents that made him born blind?

Reader 2: Jesus

Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God might be shown in it. I have to perform what I was sent here to perform while it is day. The night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

Reader 1:

After he said these things, he spat upon the ground, made mud from the spit, and anointed the blind man's eyes with the mud. Then he said to the blind man:

Reader 2:

Off with you now! Wash in the pool of Siloam.

Reader 1: (in an aside)

Siloam means “having been sent”.

(in a regular tone of voice)

So he went away from there, and washed, and he came out of the water, seeing.

Then his neighbors, and those who had seen him before because he was a beggar, said:

Band or Choir:

Wasn't this man the one who sat and begged?

Reader 1:

Others were saying:

Congregation Left:

Yes, he's the one!

Congregation Right:

No, but he looks like him.

Reader 3: Blind Man

It's me!

Congregation:

How were your eyes opened?

Reader 3:

A man called Jesus made mud, and he anointed my eyes, and he said to me, "Off with you. Go to Siloam and wash." So I went, and I washed, and I have new sight!

Congregation:

Where is that man?

Reader 3:

I don't know.

Reader 1:

Later, some Pharisees called the man who used to be blind and said to him,

Band/Choir:

Give glory to God! We know that the man who cured you is a sinner.

Reader 3:

Whether he is a sinner, I don't know. One thing I know. I was blind. Now I see.

Reader 1:

The religious leaders threw him out.

Jesus heard they had thrown him out. When Jesus found him, he said:

Reader 2:
Do you entrust your life to the Son of Man?

Reader 3:
And who is this, sir, that I may entrust my life to him?

Reader 2: You have also seen him. It's the one speaking with you.

Reader 3:
I believe, Lord. (*Kneels prostrate before Jesus*)

Reader 2:
I have come into this world in judgment, that those not seeing may see, and those seeing may become blind.

Reader 1:
Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and they said,

Band/Choir:
We're not blind, are we?

Reader 2:
If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now you say, "We see." Your sin remains.

Sermon

"Nurture"

Call to Nurture

Persons may be invited to write on cards at least one example of ways they are proclaiming the good news of Christ, living according to Christ's example, surrounding others with a community of love and forgiveness, and praying for the growth of others, and one example of each they will commit to pursue during the coming week. Remind them that if they are participating in a formation group, they are already participating in at least the last two of these, and they may include this on their list. Invite them to make two copies of these items, and give one copy to one other person with whom they will check in during the coming week to share progress and offer mutual support. As they live the call this week, ask them to document times when they've successfully acted in each area, as well as times when they've failed and needed to ask for more help. Midweek formation groups will be another opportunity to check in, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

Music during Call to Nurture

"Ubi Caritas"
OR

TFWS 2179

"People of God"

[CCLI# 5639942](#)

Prayers of the People

Proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom drawn near, we look for signs of your kingdom come we already see and pray for your saving power to continue to be made known:

**In all people kept in poverty or slavery,
in all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors,
in all who face addiction of any kind,
and in all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Seeking to live according to the example of Christ, we seek the healing of our own blindnesses, and we pray:

**For leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life;
and for all who work to sustain and protect our lives
as military, civilian workers, and first responders;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Surrounding one another with a community of love and forgiveness, we pray especially for:

**(List names of all candidates preparing for baptism or professing membership
and names of all who have been baptized or become professing members within
the past year):**

Praying that all in our fellowship may walk in the way that leads to life, we seek spiritual and physical health for all, and we pray specifically:

**with families, friends, and neighbors,
near and far, like us and different from us;
with all who need your healing power,
for all who offer healing through their skill and presence;
and for all whom we have harmed by our action or inaction;**

Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Pastor:

Receive the prayers of your people, most merciful God.
In your compassion, forgive our sins,

and drive us to lives of faithful service
in and through and beyond
the nurturing love you offer us through your church;
through Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Silence

Pastor:
In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

People:
In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.
All: Glory to God! Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Pastor:
Forgiven, restored, and united with Christ,
let us offer the peace of Christ to one another,
and our gifts to God.

The people exchange the peace of Christ as the offering is collected. If Communion is celebrated, the gifts are presented during the offertory music. If Communion is not celebrated, the gifts collected are presented during the Act of Thanksgiving.

Music during the Offering and Peace

“Welcome”

W&S 3152 OR

“The Servant Song”

TFWS 2222

Act of Thanksgiving

“There’s a Spirit of Love in This Place”

W&S 3148

OR

The Great Thanksgiving

[BOW 62-63](#)

Music during Communion

“Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love”

UMH 566

Thanksgiving after Communion

Pastor and People:

Jesus, thank you!

**You have fed us with yourself,
nurturing us with your presence.**

You surround us with love and forgiveness.

**In the power of the Holy Spirit,
send us forth as witnesses to your good news
and nurturers of one another
wherever we go. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

Invite the congregation to face the back of the sanctuary, toward the exits.

Hymn/Song

“Gracious Creator of Sea and of Land”

W&S 3161

Deacon or Lay Leader (from the back of the worship space)

Go into a world filled with bad news.

We proclaim the good news of Christ.

Go into homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

We live as Christ has shown the way.

Go into places of self-preservation and revenge.

We will surround one another with a community of love and forgiveness.

Go into an environment filled with messages that lead to death.

We will pray for one another to walk in the way that leads to life.

Pastor

Go then, with the blessing of our Triune God.

We go to live our baptismal calling. Amen.

Postlude

Variations on People of God

MUSIC NOTES

Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

A current trend in modern worship music involves taking a pre-existing strophic text and adding a new refrain (which is actually not new at all--see “Marching to Zion,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 733, a very popular example in which Robert Lowry did the very same thing in 1867 to a text of Isaac Watts, “Come, We That Love the Lord”). This practice pays homage to the hymns of the past while adding a bit of character from current approaches to songwriting. I still marvel at how well Chris Tomlin and Louis Giglio took “Amazing Grace,” which many would consider to be “untouchable” because of its popularity, and had a result so successful. This work is accessible to congregations of all shapes and sizes, and people will sing it. Be sure, however, that this doesn’t completely replace the singing of “Amazing Grace.” While congregations do appreciate and sing this song, it should not take the place of this monumental hymn every time the message of “Amazing Grace” is needed. Accompaniment can be simple to more complex, from piano alone to full band. Many interpretations of this call for the last stanza to be accompanied by piano alone, even if using a band. Ideal key is Eb,

which is what is printed in *Worship & Song*, although D or E can also work if needed. [Hymn Study](#)

Beautiful Things

“You make beautiful things out of the dust” is a reminder of what God can do in the midst of our frailty and brokenness. Your congregation may already be familiar with this song through a vacation Bible school curriculum. This week, because of the brevity of its suggested use, sing in a low range (as written) throughout. Use the same key as “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” to provide continuity in this opening set. Accompaniment is best supported with a piano, guitar, or band. For more notes on this song, refer to music notes from the first through third Sundays in Lent.

Amazing Grace

As mentioned above, sometimes “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)” simply cannot replace the singing of this classic hymn. Sung in a variety of different styles across the globe, use whatever style and accompaniment seem appropriate this week. Feel free to use a traditional style as written, but don’t be afraid if this is the week the random bagpiper in your congregation wants to play along. Or you may prefer to change the harmonies just a bit and provide a more chromatic, gospel accompaniment with slight swing rhythms and a heavy, slow tempo. Rest assured that the focus of the hymn is on God’s grace, and this can be expressed in a number of ways. For a choral setting that can be used to support congregational singing, click [here](#).

Live in Charity (Ubi Caritas)

A classic text from the ninth century, “Ubi caritas” has been set by composers through the ages from plainchant to choral works (see Maurice Duruflé, for example) to Taizé. The setting found in *The Faith We Sing* hails from the work of Jacques Berthier and the Taizé Community. Should you ever have the opportunity to visit Taizé in rural France, you will hear a number of different approaches to singing and accompaniment, depending on the time of year you attend. Most often during Lent, the accompaniment will be a simple guitar, but don’t let that stop you from using more of the instrumental obligatos found in the Accompaniment Edition of *The Faith We Sing*. The brothers of Taizé always encourage their songs to be contextualized, so accompany however is appropriate for your congregation. Songs from Taizé are very short and intended to be sung cyclically. The repetition allows the words to become the prayer of those singing, so sing it numerous times (8-10 at least) to allow the congregation an opportunity to transcend the written notes. Should members of your choir want to sing different parts, that is possible if they are confident singers. Should you choose to sing the song in Latin, here is the pronunciation:

Oo-bee cah-ree-tahs eht ah-mor

Oo-bee cah-ree-tahs Deh-oos ee-bee ehst.

To see a History of Hymns article on the translation and setting of “Ubi Caritas” in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, click [here](#).

People of God

During the Call to Nurture, this song provides opportunities for reflection during the ritual action. The range is somewhat wide, but it is not impossible for congregations to sing. Should you choose to sing it congregationally, make note that the tessitura (average range) sits high in the chorus, so I would recommend singing it no higher than the key of Bb. Should your band, praise team, or choir sing this without the congregation, choose the key most accessible for your ensemble.

Welcome

Laurie Zelman and Mark Miller's hymn, "Welcome," gives us what Laurence Hull Stookey has referred to as the "intersection of time and eternity" (*Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church*, p. 17) by connecting the past, present, and future with the eternal time of the reign of God. This hymn is rich with imagery of the table being prepared, shared, and extended into the world. If your congregation is unfamiliar with this hymn, my suggestion would be to teach it over time by asking them to sing the refrain (and taking the time to teach it to them before worship) the first time you encounter it. Continue singing it in following weeks as you gather around the table, and have soloists sing the stanzas. Over time, the congregation will associate the hymn with the Eucharist and will be able to sing it as they build their liturgical memory. When accompanying on piano, which in this case is not easy, I would recommend not playing the melody because it can easily complicate the singing. Improvise on the chords of the song and allow the voices to carry the melody.

The Servant Song

Many deacons in The United Methodist Church feel a very close connection with this hymn, and all Methodists could do the same. The very tune of this beautiful hymn of servanthood is warm and nurturing, so be sure to offer hospitality to the congregation by teaching it if they are not familiar with it. (Click [here](#) for an article about teaching new hymns to your congregation.) Set aside time at the beginning of the service to introduce the hymn so your teaching does not disrupt the flow of the service when you encounter it in the liturgy. This hymn can be accompanied with organ, piano, guitar, or any combination of instruments. Use a solo wind or string instrument to double the melody if the congregation needs support. [History of Hymns](#)

There's a Spirit of Love in this Place

As the Act of Thanksgiving for this week, this hymn is suitable for its acknowledgment of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit and the corresponding singing of Alleluias toward the end. I would recommend a tempo of 60 bpm (beats per minute), but it should never feel rushed or dragging. Build toward the Alleluias in every stanza, and encourage the choir to sing the lush, four-part harmony, which is found in the Singer's Edition of *Worship & Song*. [Hymn Study](#)

Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love

This hymn is recommended to be sung during Communion as it offers praise to God for grace and unity. If the hymn tune, HAVERGAL, is not familiar to your congregation, there are plenty of other common meter tunes you can use, such as LAND OF REST or MORNING SONG, that would be appropriate during Communion. If

you would like to try a different tune that can support congregational singing, click [here](#) for an original setting by Tom Council. The singable tune is set for choirs, but it is done simply enough that the congregation can sing along with the choral melody.

Gracious Creator of Sea and of Land

John Thornburg and Dan Damon have created a beautiful doxological hymn that offers praise to the Trinity by using vivid imagery, such as “sculptor of coral,” “miller of sand,” and the reference to Jesus’ followers as “fisherfolk.” The first stanza alludes to God the Creator, but also the story of the Exodus, in which the power of God led people to freedom. The second stanza recalls Jesus’ teaching by the Sea of Galilee and his invitation to follow him. The final stanza relates to the Pentecost story and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Dan Damon’s tune is commendable and quite easy for congregations to learn, but another choice would be SLANE (commonly associated with “Be Thou My Vision”). Sing at a tempo that allows for a subtle lilt in the 3/4 meter and gives the congregation the ability to sing entire phrases in one breath.

PREACHING NOTES

We are now four weeks into our series, so let us begin by reminding ourselves of where we’ve been on this journey so far.

We started the series by noting that the season of Lent is historically connected to baptism. In the early church, Lent developed as a final period of instruction and preparation for people who wished to become followers of Jesus Christ, and who would formally enter into this covenant through baptism on Easter morning. In this season, then, we have been considering the covenant we make when we are baptized as United Methodists.

The first week, as we considered the story of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, we reflected on the issue of temptation as it related to our first baptismal vow: *Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin?* We considered not just our battle against personal forces of wickedness and sin, but our collective fight against systemic evil in the world.

The second week we read the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night to ask him about the source of his power. We considered our need to be born again, especially in

light of our second baptismal vow: *Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*

Last week we learned about the living water that Jesus offered to the Samaritan woman, and how her encounter with Jesus transformed her life so greatly that she became the first Christian missionary. We reflected on this story as we considered our third baptismal vow: *Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races? And will you commit yourself, according to the grace given in you, to be a faithful member of Christ's holy church and serve as Christ's representative in the world?*

This week, as we consider the story of Jesus restoring sight to the man born blind, we will reflect on the role of the community of faith in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. In the baptismal covenant the community of faith plays a critical role. The gathered worshipping community is asked:

Will you nurture these persons in Christ's holy Church, that by your teaching and example, they may be guided to accept God's grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

How does a community nurture a person in the faith? How does YOUR community live out this part of the baptismal covenant? And what insights in to that task might be found in this story about Jesus healing a man who had been blind since birth?

There are three distinct communities in this story: the disciples of Jesus; the neighbors who had known the blind beggar and his family since the man was born; and a small group of Pharisees. Each community responds in a different way to what they witness.

The disciples are the only ones to actually hear the conversation between Jesus and the blind beggar. They are eyewitnesses to their master making mud out of spit and dirt, spreading it on the man's eyes, and ordering him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. But the disciples don't seem to be all that interested in the man regaining his sight. They are

distracted by wanting to know the cause of the man's blindness. They believe, as did most people in this time period, that a person suffering from a physical or mental ailment was being punished for sin. And so the disciples wonder aloud whether this man is blind because of his own sin, or because of the sins of his parents.

It appears that once the man went off to the pool of Siloam to wash the mud out of his eyes as Jesus instructed him, the disciples do not encounter him again until the end of the story when the newly sighted man becomes a member of the community of followers of Jesus himself. It is not clear from the text whether they even witnessed the man's miraculous healing, although we might surmise that, having witnessed Jesus healing many people before, they simply trusted that the man would be able to see as Jesus promised. John implies that after Jesus put the mud on the man and sent him to the pool, the disciples went on their way, and their interaction with the blind man ended. It is not clear whether they were present during Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees.

As a community, then, the disciples do nothing to nurture this man in the faith. They seem to have little sympathy for him as a human being, and their main concern is to know exactly who is to blame for his condition.

How many times have we, when confronted with someone whose physical condition is outside what is considered normative, found ourselves wondering about how the person got that way? What did that man do that led to him being homeless and panhandling on the street? If I give him money, will he squander it on drugs or alcohol? Is he an addict? Is he mentally ill? What is wrong with that woman who collects disability checks each month? She looks perfectly able to work to me! Is she cheating the government so she can sit around and watch television all day? Why does that young man insist that he is really a female and should be able to use the ladies' bathroom? Clearly he is a male. What about that young black man with the baggy pants who walks up and down the street all day long. Why isn't he in school? Where are his parents? Is he in a gang? Is he selling drugs? Does he have a gun?

Communities form strong parameters around their identities. Once the boundaries that create clear insiders and outsiders are determined, the only thing that remains is to

make judgments about who is welcome and who is not. The criteria for making this determination is often centered in blame:

- That man is blind because he has sinned, so he can't be a member of our community.
- That woman can't be the pastor in our community because her command of the English language is not good enough.
- That child is not welcome in our worship services because he makes noise and runs around during church and his parents will not control him.

Here we see the community of Jesus' closest followers—his own disciples—making assumptions about this man's condition. In doing so, they not only reject him themselves, but they give justification for the wider community to continue to reject him. He is blind because he or someone close to him has sinned. He deserves his punishment. The community does not have to nurture him because his blindness is his own fault. The community is free to ostracize him and deny him access to what those who have not committed the sin that leads to blindness take for granted, such as employment opportunities, a place to live, and friends and family who won't deny knowing him in order to protect their own privileged status in the community.

The second community in this story is the neighbors from the village where the blind man was born, and where he and his family continue to live. Their response is curious: even though this is a man they have known all their lives, now that he can see, some of them can no longer recognize him, even after he repeatedly identifies himself to them. Once the Pharisees enter the picture, his own family won't speak on his behalf, for fear that they will be identified with the Jesus followers and ostracized by their community of faith.

Why are the neighbors unable to recognize this man once he is no longer disabled? Do we have difficulty accepting changes in people? Do we put them in a category that, once they are labeled, they can never escape? Or do we believe that people really can change, be born again, made into new creatures? Do we believe that a person who has committed multiple heinous crimes can be forgiven, and even rehabilitated? Do we believe that a mother who has lost custody of her children because of addiction can

ever be trusted with children again? Do we believe that someone who has hurt us can ever be worthy of our forgiveness?

It appears to me that like the community of disciples, the neighborhood community, and even the family, of the blind beggar also do nothing to nurture this man in his faith. Some don't even believe Jesus has healed him. They don't believe he is the same man they have known all their lives. Others want to know how it is that he was healed, and where this miracle healer has gone. Surprisingly, not one of the man's lifelong neighbors celebrates this miracle, or cries tears of joy for his healing, or embraces him in love. At least, not according to John's account of the story.

The last community in the story is the small group of Pharisees. The Pharisees get stuck on a couple of issues. Some suggest Jesus cannot be a man from God if he broke the law and healed a man on the Sabbath. Not only is he a fraud, but he is a sinner just like the blind man. Others do not seem so hasty to make this judgment, so they continue to question the blind man. "What do you say about him?" And the healed man says he believes Jesus to be a prophet.

This response seems to really upset the Pharisaic community, to the point that they decide it must not be true that this man was born blind. Their judgment is that the whole story is a lie. So they go to question the man's parents.

The parents, as noted above, confirm that their son was born blind, and now can see, but they know nothing of how that came to be. The Gospel writer indicates that they then distance themselves from their son because they don't want to be associated with the followers of Jesus. They are afraid this association will cause them to lose status in their community.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees, still not satisfied with the answers they have heard, return their attention to the fact that Jesus, by performing a work of healing on the Sabbath, is a sinner. The healing the man has received is not the work of Jesus; it is the work of God. They get into a back and forth with the healed man in an effort to pigeonhole him as a person who has chosen to give allegiance to a false prophet, a sinner who doesn't even observe the Sabbath. The blind man, despite being healed of his impairment, is in

the end judged by the Pharisees to be an unrepentant sinner who continues to practice a sinful lifestyle. They refuse to honor his testimony. They reject that he has been healed of the sin that caused his blindness. They tell him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drive him out of town, banishing him from the only community he has ever known.

Jesus gets word of what has happened, seeks the man out, and invites him into the community of his disciples. And perhaps for the first time in his life, this man becomes part of a community that will actually nurture him in the faith.

For me, this is the real miracle in this story. This is where our role as a community of faith in the baptismal covenant really gets some legs under it.

I don’t mean to imply that the restoration of sight to a man who has been blind his entire life is not an incredible gift. It is. But the real power in the story, to me, is that this man—a man who had been born blind; who had been judged to be a sinner and rejected by his community, and even his own family, because of something that was beyond his control; who had suffered a lifetime of ostracism; and who had been reduced to earning a living by begging on the side of the road—found not just healing, but grace, welcome, and even love, in the community of followers of Jesus Christ.

Oh, that our communities of faith could truly be places of this kind of welcome and nurture for all who pass through our doors. Open our eyes, Lord, to see people not with our own eyes, but with yours. Open our arms to welcome those who have been rejected or cast out by their communities and families. Open our hearts to be able to truly love those whom we have judged to be sinners. And help us, that by our teaching and example, those whom you send to our communities maybe be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, profess their faith openly, and lead Christian lives.

PLANNING NOTES

Fourth Sunday in Lent Living Our Baptismal Calling: “Nurture”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectonnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

Living Our Baptismal Calling: “Nurture”

Today is the fourth Sunday in the Lenten series, “Living the Baptismal Calling.” Today’s focus is on the fourth and eighth baptismal questions: To parents and sponsors: Will you nurture these children/persons in Christ’s holy Church, that by your teaching and example they may be guided to accept God’s grace for themselves, to profess their faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?

To the congregation: Will you nurture one another in the Christian faith and life and include these persons now before you in your care?

Today also marks the first time we observe what we now call “UMCOR Sunday.” The former designation was One Great Hour of Sharing. The title was changed by General Conference in 2016 to reflect that all funds raised for this day in United Methodist Churches are specifically to offset the administrative costs of the work of the United Methodist Committee on Relief.

March

All Month

[Women’s History Month](#)

March 26 [UMCOR Sunday](#) (formerly One Great Hour of Sharing)

April

April 9

[Passion/Palm Sunday](#)

New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday

April 13

[Maundy Thursday](#)

April 14

[Good Friday](#)

April 15

[Holy Saturday \(Full Twitter script with audio links\) #holysat17](#)

[Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources](#) [Simplified Service](#)

April 16

[Easter Sunday](#)

April 23

[Festival of God’s Creation](#)

New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)

April 25

[World Malaria Day](#)

April 30

[Native American Ministries Sunday](#)

May

All Month

[Christian Home Month](#)

[Asian Pacific American Heritage Month](#)

May 4

[National Day of Prayer \(USA\)](#)

May 5

[May Friendship Day](#)

May 8-14

[Christian Family Week](#)

May 14

[Festival of the Christian Home/Mother’s Day \(USA\)](#)

May 21

[Heritage Sunday](#)

May 24

[Aldersgate Day](#)

May 25	<u>Ascension Day</u>
May 28	<u>Ascension Sunday (if transferred)</u>
May 29	<u>Memorial Day (USA)</u>
June	
June 4	<u>Day of Pentecost (Easter Season Concludes)</u>
June 11	<u>Trinity Sunday, Peace with Justice Sunday</u>
	New Series Begins: TBA
June 18	<u>Father's Day (USA)</u>
June 19	<u>Juneteenth</u>
July	
July 4	<u>Independence Day</u>

For Your Planning Team: Living Our Baptismal Calling "NURTURE"

In This Series

You gather in worship on Sunday to hear and respond to one of the baptismal questions, grounded in the Scriptures, and then continue with at least two additional opportunities for follow up on that baptismal calling (one on one, and in formation group gatherings) throughout the week. You may also have had three Sunday morning or midweek Courageous Conversation events that model and help advance work on what it means to be "in union with the church which Christ opens to people of **all** ages, nations, and races."

Keep these patterns going strong this week and next. Holy Week will include new patterns.

Today

Nurture may, at first glance, seem an unusual choice as a theme for today's gospel reading. Healing or "illumination" perhaps, would make more immediate sense.

But what we see Jesus doing in this passage is more than healing and even more than illumination. Jesus stays available to this man and advocates for him beyond the point of his healing. One he learns the man had been thrown out of the synagogue, Jesus goes to find him. He does so not merely to console him, but primarily to help him take the next step in his spiritual growth. Jesus leads the man toward faith into him as more than healer, but, as Son of Man, the One who is to come and set the world aright.

This is the work of nurture we are also called to do. We proclaim good news. We live by the example of Christ (including this example in this story). We surround others with a community of love and forgiveness, even and perhaps especially when some seek to throw such people out. Part of that work of surrounding is staying in touch and going out to find those who need us, whether they know they need us or not. And we pray for people to be able to walk in the way that leads to life.

We bring healing to others, yes. We open blinded eyes, yes. We proclaim good news, yes. But, like Jesus, we do not stop there. We remain connected with those among whom we offer all these things, not so they will increase our number, but so that all of us may continue to walk in the way Jesus shows us, the way of Truth and Life.

As we have done throughout this series, this service provides four opportunities to encounter and respond to the baptismal question that underlies both worship and formation groups this week. After the opening song set, the pastor asks the congregation the baptismal questions, and the congregation responds in assent, using the words of the baptismal covenant. In the response to the sermon, all are invited to write down in two cards how they will seek to proclaim the good news, live according to the example of Christ, surround others with a community of love and forgiveness, and pray for others to walk in the way that leads to life. The congregational response also forms the frame of both the prayers of the people and the dismissal.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Fourth Sunday in Lent](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam

FORMATION GROUP NOTES

The patterns for the one-hour group meeting should continue as you have established them.

1. Brief, informal time of gathering (10 minutes) with snacks to share.
2. Formal gathering and prayer-- Group members are seated in a circle in chairs or around a table-- with requests for prayer for the coming week (10 minutes) and prayer led by the group leader or unison in the group.
3. Teaching and testimony-- (35 minutes)-- For this week, there are four verbs to focus upon: *proclaim*, *live*, *surround*, and *pray*. Together, these four kinds of actions compose what we mean by Christian nurture. Plan to take about eight to nine minutes for each verb. Plan to spend no more than two minutes teaching about each one (see below), and the remaining time for sharing how each is working on each one, how each has exercised each one during the past week or recent past, what has happened because because each did, and how each seeks to improve.
4. Blessing and sending --Gather in a circle or huddle, lay hands on one another, one by one, and pray over each in unison: "X, may you continue to grow in Christ in the days ahead" (5 minutes). Thank all for coming, and send the group out to continue to grow.

TEACHING 1: PROCLAIM the Good News

The good news we proclaim is the good news Jesus proclaimed: The kingdom of God has drawn near. As God's kingdom draws near, the powers and forces that keep people oppressed, harmed, or otherwise enslaved are overcome, and people are set free. Some are set free from disease. Others are set free from political oppression and injustice. Still others, as the man in this story, are now able to see.

Part of the good news we see in this story involves exposing the lies of oppressive powers for what they are. The assumption the disciples had about people born blind was such people or their parents must have been particularly sinful to cause such a condition. No, Jesus says. He was born this way not because of anyone's sin, but to enable God's glory to shine, whether in his blindness or in overcoming it.

There is great good news just here. Congenital blindness had been understood to be the result of sin and was therefore used culturally as a reason to dismiss people as "less than" or even "tainted" or "unclean." Jesus rejected that reasoning entirely.

So part of proclaiming the good news today is not only to declare the news that God's kingdom has drawn near, but to contradict every bit of news that some people are to be withdrawn from. Instead, those targeted by culture as "unclean" are the very people Christ draws near to, near enough to touch them on the eyes with love, care, and actions that bring the marginalized back into community as much as possible.

How are you proclaiming the good news? How are you also contradicting the many kinds of bad news this world tells others? How might you do these two things better? How can we help you do so?

TEACHING 2: LIVE according to the Example of Christ

"The example of Christ" comprises everything we see Jesus do across all four gospels. That's way too much to handle for one session. This is an agenda for lifelong learning and growth. That's important to remember. It points us to the lifelong commitment we make to Christ and to one another in the church. We will keep learning from Jesus, keep working on living it out, and keep teaching others by living what we learn.

So for this session, focus on those core practices of learning to live out the way of Jesus people already have built into their lives, and those they can build in better and help one another do likewise. What are your patterns of prayer? How do you read and study the Bible, especially the gospels? What groups are you part of that actively help you live the way of Jesus more fully (including this one). What processes do you use to put in practice what you learn from prayer and study?

TEACHING 3: SURROUND These People with a Community of Love and Forgiveness

Surrounding people can seem like an aggressive move. When the intent of the surrounding is to prevent an escape or to seek to force compliance, then it may be more harmful than helpful.

But we pledge to surround people with a community of love and forgiveness. A community of love allows for freedom. There is no compulsion in love. And a community of forgiveness allows for much mercy, learning, and growth. The community of love and forgiveness we pledge to form together as a congregation, and perhaps in more concrete ways as a formation group, is a band of sisters and brothers who commit to

watch over one another in love.

Surrounding remains a key tactic. We want there to be no place you go that you cannot rely on others offering you encouragement, support, and, where needed, direction and restorative correction.

To be a community of love and forgiveness requires each of us to participate in such acts of surrounding one another, with love and forgiveness at our core. What are you doing right now to participate actively in such community with others, and especially with those who are newly baptized or new members, or those who may be baptized or become professing members in the near future? What might you do more or better? How can others in the group help you do that?

TEACHING 4: PRAY for Them, That They May Be True Disciples

Each week, our closing act of blessing is already a form of prayer we offer to God and for one another that we each may be true disciples of Jesus who walk in the way that leads to life. This is one small, brief, weekly action we already take in this group.

But the call here is for the whole church to continue this, not just once a week, but constantly, especially (though not exclusively) for the newcomers among us. How are you praying for the spiritual life and growth of others in this congregation, and other Christians generally? How often and how intentionally are you doing so? How might you do this better than you are now? How might we help you do that?

LENT: LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL CALLING

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: BELIEVE!

FULL SERVICE

Fifth Sunday in Lent: BELIEVE!

Let us join together in professing the Christian faith, as contained in the Old and New Testaments. Do you entrust your life to God the Father?... Do you entrust your life to Jesus Christ?... Do you entrust your life to the Holy Spirit?

ENTRANCE

“This I Believe”

“We Believe in One True God”

[CCLI #7018338](#) OR

UMH 85

Music of “This I Believe” or “We Believe in One True God” continues to play. Pastor, standing by the font, lifts the water while asking each question:

Do you entrust your life to God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you entrust your life to Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born of the Virgin Mary,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;
 he descended to the dead.
 On the third day rose again;
 he ascended into heaven,
 is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 and will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you entrust your life to the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy catholic church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting.**

Reprise: Final chorus of "This I Believe" or stanza 3 of "We Believe in One True God"

WORD AND RESPONSE

John 11:1-15; 20-27; 31-35; 38-45

Translated by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Readers assemble by the font while music to "When Jesus Wept" plays in the background.

Congregation remains seated.

Soloist hums the tune.

Reader 1: Narrator

Now a certain man fell ill, Lazarus, from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha. This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother, Lazarus, was ill. So the sisters sent to Jesus, saying:

Congregation:

Lord, the friend you love is ill.

Reader 1:

When Jesus heard it, he said:

Reader 2: Jesus

This illness doesn't end in death, but in the glory of God, so the son of God may be glorified through it.

Reader 1:

Now, Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. Still, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was two days more. Then, after that, he said to his disciples:

Reader 2:

Let's go to Judea again.

Choir or band:

Rabbi, people in Judea want to stone us, and you're taking us there again?

Reader 2:

Aren't there twelve hours of daylight? If people walk in the daylight, they don't stumble because they see the light of this world. But if they go walking at night, they do stumble, because there is no light in them.

(Silence)

Lazarus, our friend, has fallen asleep. But I'm heading there to waken him!

Choir or band:

Lord, if he's asleep, he's going to be safe.

Reader 2:

Lazarus died. And I'm happy for your sake that I wasn't there. This way, you might believe. So, let's go to him!

Readers re-assemble by the pulpit.

Soloist sings "When Jesus Wept" (TFWS 2106)

Reader 1:

When Martha heard that Jesus was arriving, she went to greet him. Mary sat in the house.

Congregation, Right Side:

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.

Reader 2:

Your brother will rise again.

Congregation, Right Side:

I know he will be raised at the resurrection on the last day.

Reader 2:

I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever entrusts their life to me, even though they should die, yet they will live. And everyone who is alive and entrusts their life to me shall not die in the age to come. Do you believe this?

Congregation, Right Side:

Yes, Lord. I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who is coming into the world.

Readers move to the Lord's Table.

Soloist and one other sing "When Jesus Wept" in a round.

Reader 1: There were several religious leaders with Mary in the house, comforting her. They saw Mary get up and go out, and they followed her, assuming she was heading to the tomb to bewail there. But when Mary got to where Jesus was, she saw him, and fell at his feet, saying:

Congregation, Left:

Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

Reader 1:

When Jesus saw her bewailing, and the religious leaders who had come with her also bewailing, he groaned in his spirit. He was stirred up.

Reader 2:

Where have you laid him?

Choir or band:

Sir, come and see.

Reader 1:

Jesus teared up and began to weep.

Soloist sings "When Jesus Wept"

Readers move to front and center, floor level.

Reader 1:

So again, groaning inwardly, Jesus goes to the tomb. A cave was there, and a stone lay upon it.

Reader 2:

Lift away the stone.

Reader 1: Martha, sister of the dead man, said to him:

Congregation, Right:

Lord, already he smells bad. It's been four days.

Reader 2:

Did I not say to you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?

Reader 1:

So they lifted away the stone.

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said:

Reader 2:

Father, I thank you that you have heard me. Indeed, I have always known you hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing around so they might believe you have sent me.

(Loudly shouting): Lazarus, come out!

Reader 1: The dead man came out, bound foot and hand with strips of cloth, and his face was wrapped with a facecloth.

Reader 2:

Unbind him, and let him go his way.

Soloists and readers signal congregation to rise.

“When Jesus Wept” (3X: unison once, round twice) TFWS 2106

Sermon

“Believe!”

Call to Believe

People may be invited to write on cards at least one example of a way they currently entrust their lives to God as creator, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and one example of each they will commit to pursue during the coming week. Invite them to make two copies of these items, and give one copy to one other person with whom they will check in during the coming week to share progress and offer mutual support. As they live the call this week, ask them to document times when they’ve successfully entrusted themselves to each person of the Trinity, as well as times when they’ve failed and needed to ask for more help. Midweek formation groups will be another opportunity to check in, pray for one another, and encourage one another.

Music During Call to Believe

“We Believe” (Hooper, Fike, Ryan)

[CCLI # 6367165](#)

Prayers of the People

Professing the faith of the whole church, we thank you for the wonders of your creation

on land and water, in sky and outer space, and in the lives of plants, animals, and people; and we pray for the unbinding of all from whatever restrains them from realizing the creative potential you have given:

**For all people kept in poverty or slavery,
for all who are in fear from abusers, terrorists, and oppressors,
for all who face addiction of any kind,
and for all who are targeted for unjust treatment because of who they are;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Entrusting our lives to Jesus Christ, we seek resurrection and life for every person, and we pray:

**For leaders in religious, political, economic, and social life;
and for all who work to sustain and protect our lives
as military, civilian workers, and first responders;**

Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Placing ourselves at the disposal of the Holy Spirit, we go where the Spirit blows as witnesses of your love and power to heal, Triune God, and we pray:

**with families, friends, and neighbors,
near and far, like us and different from us;
with all who need your healing power,
for all who offer healing through their skill and presence;
and for all whom we have harmed by our action or inaction;**

Silence

Lord in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Pastor:

Receive the prayers of your people, Triune God.
In your compassion, forgive our sins,
and drive us to lives of faithful service
as we continue to profess our faith
and entrust our lives into your keeping;
through Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Silence

Pastor:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

People:

In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven.

All: Glory to God! Amen!

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION

Pastor:

Forgiven, restored, and united with Christ,
let us offer the peace of Christ to one another,
and our gifts to God.

The people exchange the peace of Christ as the offering is collected.

Music during the Offering and Peace

“Out of the Depths I Cry to You”

“I Believe” (Miller)—Choral Anthem

UMH 515 OR

[Choristers Guild, CGA 1310](#)

The Great Thanksgiving

[BOW 62-63](#) OR

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your eyes.

We see our deliverer coming!

Bless the Lord!

God’s holy name be praised!

Praised in heaven, praised in earth,
praised throughout your creation
is your name, Holy Triune God.

The trees of the field rejoice in your salvation,
and clap their hands.

The stars shine out your glory,
and the earth trembles at your presence.

Winds and waters scatter at the sound of your voice,
and we, with all creation, cry “Holy!”

**Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are fully of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is the One who comes in your name!
Hosanna in the highest!**

Blessed are you, Jesus Christ,
Way and Truth,
Resurrection and Life.
Calling disciples and making friends among us,
you ask us to believe
to entrust our lives to you,
God's first-begotten,
that we, with you, may rise
in the midst of this mortal life
and in the age to come.

Vanquisher of death,
Giver of life,
thank you for coming among us
and for offering yourself to us
in this holy meal
to lift every barrier,
call us out from every tomb,
and set us free from all that binds us.

With your first disciples, on the night of your betrayal into death,
you took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, saying:
Take and eat this, my body given for you.

And you took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it, saying:
Drink this, my blood of the new covenant for you.

Here and now, come, Holy Spirit.
Come, Holy Spirit.

Come upon these gifts
and upon us.
Make them be for us
Christ's body and blood,
that we who receive them may be for all
the body of Christ made alive by his blood.

Come, Holy Spirit.
Make us one.

Come, Holy Spirit.
Unite us with you.

Come, Holy Spirit.
Revive us!

Make us whole and holy on this day,
 as we await that day
 when we shall feast with Christ
 in the new creation.

To Christ, to you, and to the All-Merciful Creator,
 One God, Living and true,
 be all praise, and honor, and glory
 now and forever.
Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread and Distribution

Music during Communion

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
 Creed (Mullins)

UMH 519 OR
[CCLI #1263924](#)

Thanksgiving after Communion

Pastor and People:

Jesus, thank you!

**You have fed us with yourself,
 restoring our lives
 and enlivening our faith
 by your presence.**

You are the resurrection and the life!

**In the power of the Holy Spirit,
 send us forth, unbound in body, mind, and spirit,
 to proclaim our faith in your Triune being and infinite love,
 wherever we go. Amen.**

SENDING FORTH

Invite the congregation to face the back of the sanctuary, toward the exits.

Hymn/Song

“Gracious Creator of Sea and of Land”

W&S 3161

Deacon or Lay Leader (from the back of the worship space)

Go into a world filled with death and mourning.

We entrust our lives to Jesus Christ, the Resurrection and the Life.

Go into homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

We entrust our lives to God, Almighty Creator.

Go into places of judgment and fear.

We entrust our lives to the Holy Spirit, who shows us the truth and empowers us.

Pastor

Go then, with the blessing of our Triune God.
We go to live our baptismal calling. Amen.

Postlude

Worship team needs to have this conversation-- Do you believe Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe into, stake your life on, or are ready to stake your life on, the resurrection and the life everlasting? If so, why?

MUSIC NOTES

This I Believe

Hillsong has crafted a wonderful liturgical piece that is intended to function as a *credo*, paraphrasing and rearranging the parts of the Apostles' Creed. Remarkably, they crafted it into a song that has a "Verse-Chorus-Bridge" form. One of the only concerns is the deconstruction of the Apostles' Creed into a series of statements that are not orderly in presentation. In other words, the attributes of the three persons of the Trinity are scattered throughout the song. However, the creed's form has been replaced by the form of the song structure, and this might provide enough to help internalize this historic statement of belief. The melody is simple and repetitive enough, but also motivic, so the congregation should be able to learn it with little effort. Accompaniment can vary from solo piano or guitar to full band. Again, if accompanying with piano, do not double the melody. Allow the voices to lead the rhythm to avoid bogging down the rhythm.

We Believe in One True God

This sung creed is very compact and concise in its structure, and it fits within the bounds of appropriate Wesleyan doctrine and theology. Each stanza is focused upon a different person of the Trinity. RATISBON is a beautiful tune and, for the most part, easily singable. If it is unfamiliar to your congregation, don't hesitate to use the tune DIX (commonly associated with "For the Beauty of the Earth") instead. Accompany with organ or piano, and keep the tempo somewhere between 104-108. Your congregation will appreciate a slightly brisk tempo on this hymn when working to support the higher notes of the RATISBON tune. For a remarkable choral setting of this work by composer Tom Council, click [here](#).

When Jesus Wept

This hymn by early American choral and tune composer, William Billings, is stark in its minimalist nature. The power of the hymn in relation to the story of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus cannot be overstated and provides a moving backdrop for Jesus' emotion in the story. The recommendations for this hymn and tune are varied this week, depending on the development of the narrative. Each recommendation is featured in a rubric within the Scripture reading. For the instrumental suggestion, any instrument will work to accompany the reading, but I would select an instrument that has an inherent

mourning quality, with the best suggestion being a cello. If possible, allow the soloist and duet to sing a cappella. If a tonal center is needed for the vocalists, instruct the cello to play a D pedal tone underneath the singing. The cello (or other instrument) can return to the melody again when the congregation joins in singing. There are a couple of ways to split up the leading of the canon:

- 1) If you have a choir, divide them into three or four parts to support the work of the entire congregation.
- 2) If you are only using one instrument and two vocalists, have each of them play or sing one part of the canon.

Divide the congregation in three or four parts in a way that makes sense in the seating arrangement of the worship space. Try to have the vocalists also work on cueing the congregation when the entrance of each section begins.

We Believe

At first glance, it may appear that the range of this song makes it unsingable by your congregation. However, there is a way to do it, especially within the ritual action set forth in this service. As people are writing, have a soloist sing the verses and welcome the congregation to sing the chorus as they feel led. Since they will be writing during the Call to Believe, singing should be optional. If the band, praise team, soloist, or choir are the only ones singing during this time, that is perfectly acceptable. If the congregation does sing, however, my recommendation is to sing in the key of F, with the chorus down one octave from what is written in the vocal sheet found on the CCLI website. This puts the song within a comfortable range, especially for this time of reflection. Accompany with piano, guitar, or band.

Out of the Depths

Martin Luther created a haunting text (translated by Gracia Grindal) and tune based upon the lament of Psalm 130. The melody is written in what is known as the Phrygian mode, which possesses a dark, brooding quality with the lowered second degree of the E harmonic minor scale. Austin Lovelace harmonized the tune, but it is often most effectively presented and sung with a unison melody and sparse instrumentation--maybe an E pedal tone from an organ and a string or wind melody. It may also be effective to have a choir sing parts (with organ accompaniment) beginning on the pickup to measure 11 and continuing through the first note of measure 15, with the pedal tone and unison melody returning on the last phrase. Another way to create a pedal tone with handbells is the "singing bell" technique. To read more about this ethereal use of handbells, click [here](#). If you choose this technique, I recommend using E and B bells only. It might also be possible to use higher bells in a random ring using more notes from the E Phrygian mode scale. Make sure to take plenty of time between phrases, and do not rush the singing of the lament. Keep it moving, but allow time for each phrase to settle and the congregation to breathe. The lack of a rigid tempo will allow the mournful quality to permeate the singing of this hymn.

I Believe

Mark Miller's choral work, published by Choristers Guild, has been featured in worship services across the country, including a community service following the July 7,

2016, shooting in Dallas involving the death of five Dallas police officers. The words of this work are taken from a short, anonymous poem from a victim of the Holocaust in World War II, and Miller's choral setting is appropriate for adult and youth choirs. Children's choirs can also be used to sing along with the melody. The piece builds in intensity and volume as the same chorus is sung repetitively, and the last words are sung by a soloist. This selection stands as one of Miller's finest works.

Lift Every Voice and Sing

A monumental hymn in African-American churches across the country, this hymn by the creator of *God's Trombones*, James Weldon Johnson, is a rousing call for people to praise the God of hope and freedom. "Lift Every Voice and Sing" recalls the "dark past" (stanza 1) and the power of God to liberate and bring people to victory. In addition to its place in African American history, the hymn is full of narrative imagery, and the music is incredibly dramatic. Singing this hymn takes some time because of the long text and slow tempo required to sing it appropriately. A suggested tempo would be around 132 (per eighth note). Accompany with piano, organ, or rhythm section (piano and/or organ, bass, drums). [History of Hymns](#)

Creed

We recommend this work to your worship this week as a song only sung by a praise team, soloist, or band. This selection is not recommended for congregational singing unless there has been a concerted effort to put it before the people numerous times leading up to this service. It is a great song by singer Rich Mullins, but it is incredibly syncopated. Though it is somewhat repetitive, the repetitions aren't always the same, so it makes the singing of it very difficult. Use whatever key is most accessible for your ensemble, and give it life. Because of the focus on belief, sing this in a celebrative tone during Communion, even if that is different from normal. This is a point where the open table and our doctrine intersect, and that is reason to offer praise to God.

Gracious Creator of Sea and of Land

John Thornburg and Dan Damon have created a beautiful doxological hymn that offers praise to the Trinity by using vivid imagery, such as "sculptor of coral," "miller of sand," and the reference to Jesus' followers as "fisherfolk." The first stanza alludes to God the Creator, but also the story of the Exodus, in which the power of God led people to freedom. The second stanza recalls Jesus' teaching by the Sea of Galilee and his invitation to follow him. The final stanza relates to the Pentecost story and the movement of the Holy Spirit, but the final plea to "summon our courage" is quite appropriate as we move toward Holy Week. Dan Damon's tune is commendable and quite easy for congregations to learn, but another choice would be SLANE (commonly associated with "Be Thou My Vision"). Sing at a tempo that allows for a subtle lilt in the 3/4 meter and gives the congregation the ability to sing entire phrases in one breath.

PREACHING NOTES

On this final week of our Lenten series, the lectionary gives us the [story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead](#). Practically speaking, the fifth Sunday in Lent begins preparing us for hearing the Easter proclamation, “Christ is risen!” and for our baptism into the faith in which this proclamation is the centerpiece, by foreshadowing what is to come.

In our series, alongside the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead comes the final part of our baptismal vow, which is to answer in creedal form what the church teaches us about our apostolic faith. Historically, those preparing for baptism on Easter had to commit to memory certain tenets of the faith, including its core teachings. Candidates for baptism were asked to confess their faith in response to three questions:

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
[who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and will come again to judge the living and the dead.]**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
[the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.]**

As we studied this passage together as a worship team, and placed it alongside the creed from our baptismal ritual, what came into focus for us was to consider what it means to people to say that they believe in the resurrection of the body. One of the most helpful insights in the discussion came from my colleague, Taylor Burton-Edwards, who is a Greek scholar. Taylor pointed out that a more helpful translation of the creed, would be to say that we believe *into* these things.

**SIDEBAR: Living *Into* Our Baptismal Faith
By Taylor Burton-Edwards**

As we've noted several times throughout these weeks, the phrase that begins each article of the Apostles' (and Nicene) Creed, usually translated "believe in" would be better translated, literally, as "believe into." "Believing into" someone means entrusting one's life to someone.

What each article of the creed is really asking then is not whether we give intellectual assent to the idea, for example, that there is a God who created everything. That's assumed, but it's not the main point. The real question behind each article of the creed is whether we are prepared to entrust our lives to a God who, in three persons united in one Being, does or is like what each article of the creed asserts.

END SIDEBAR

"I am believing into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

What does this statement mean to you, personally?

How would you unpack this statement if you were talking about your own faith journey?

What examples would you give as evidence of your believing into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting?

In John's account, Jesus asks a similar question of Martha:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (John 11:36-37 NRSV).

Martha is specific in her answer, and we must be specific in ours.

What does it mean to you that you are believing into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting?

For some believers, the power of any story about resurrection rests in a literal interpretation. Somebody who was dead is now living for eternity:

- I believe Jesus raised Lazarus, who had been dead in a tomb for four days, back to life.
- I believe Jesus was physically raised from the dead.
- I believe I will be raised from the dead too, somehow. That's what it means to be saved. There is really no need to overthink or over-explain the specifics of how that works.
- I believe I'm going to be raised with Jesus and reunited with my dead family members.

Among the members of the worship team, our responses were not just different from this, but they were all different from each other. Likewise, I imagine if you asked five people from your congregation what that statement meant to them, you would get five completely different answers.

Jackson Henry spoke tenderly of having seen the resurrection of the dead in his family, in people he knows, and even in his own life. For him, rising with Jesus means more than the possibility of going to heaven to reside eternally with God at the end of his time on this earth. Resurrection is, for him, a daily opportunity to reclaim who we are as children of God and to overcome death in life every day.

He spoke of those he knew who battle daily with addiction: people he loves who cannot, no matter how much they want to, kick their habit. And yet, even in the midst of their own repeat failures, they believe there is hope. They are living into the resurrection by living into the hope and the promise that somehow, someday, some day, they will be set free from their sickness unto death. They will be made new.

People who are daily overcoming their problems in life are living into the resurrection as well. What is it they say in twelve-step programs? No one is recovered; rather, we are *in recovery*. None among us is done; we are all going on to perfection. We who are overcoming our problems in life are doing so by believing into a power greater than ourselves. Many are believing into the hope of the resurrection and the life that is offered in Christ. We believe that in Christ, all things are possible.

If we see resurrection only as something that comes after death, we miss the daily fruits of living into Jesus' proclamation, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Taylor Burton-Edwards identified very closely with Martha. For him, it was encounters with the holy that have shaken his foundations. He had difficulty describing these encounters. He said, "There aren't words."

Encounters with the holy are experiential, personal, spiritual, and emotional. Jesus tells Martha her brother will rise again, and then he asks her if she believes in resurrection. She answers first in a general way: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Her response only becomes specific and personal when Jesus turns from conversation to personal experience, from general knowledge to holy encounter, by saying, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

For Taylor, the closest he could come to describing holy encounter was to speak of places where physicality intersects with spirituality. One place this happened for him was through encounters with icons. Specifically, icons of Jesus bursting out of the tomb, "the brilliant ones, not the faded ones." Encounters with these sacred objects took him out of the metaphorical and into the physical. It is physical to look at an icon, to touch

one. One does not have to venerate to be moved. He described having a physical response in these encounters with the holy: his skin tingled, he could barely speak, he felt overcome with love and emotion.

He went on to say that he experienced a holy encounter every time he came to the Table of the Lord. He found the experience of Holy Communion so physically and spiritually moving that he could hardly say the prayer without becoming overtaken by emotion.

It is like Martha, who—after this encounter with the holiness of Jesus, with his words, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”—could only let what flooded her mind and heart come pouring out of her mouth: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

Yes, Lord, I believe.

Yes, Lord, I am believing into you.

Yes, Lord, I am believing into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

For me, the power of believing into the resurrection is found in love. I find the holy in encounters with love:

- The miracle of love.
- The miracle of being loved.
- The miracle of people choosing to love instead of hate.

It is overwhelming, that God so loved the world, *that God so loved me personally*, that he would give his only son, that whoever believed into him should not perish, but have eternal life. It is overwhelming, that God would do this for any of us.

What does it mean to you that you are believing into the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting?

Well, it has been quite a journey through this series on “Living Our Baptismal Calling.” Are we ready to make our baptismal covenant? Are we prepared to renew our commitment to the vows made at our baptism?

Next week, beginning with Passion/Palm Sunday, we will begin our walk with Jesus through the final days and hours of his life on this earth. We will join the disciples in hearing his last words. We will gather with them for a final meal and receive a new commandment. We will watch as Jesus is arrested and tried, found guilty and crucified on a cross. And then, after three days, we will go with the women to the tomb, to anoint Jesus’ body for burial, and witness the miracle that gave birth to the church, delivered

us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant, by water and the Spirit.

PLANNING NOTES

Fifth Sunday in Lent Living Our Baptismal Calling: “BELIEVE!”

Reading Notes

NRSV texts, artwork and [Revised Common Lectionary Prayers](#) for this service are available at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

**Living Our Baptismal Calling:
“BELIEVE!”**

Today is the fifth Sunday in the Lenten series, “Living the Baptismal Calling.” Today’s focus is on the last baptismal question, the call to profess, with the church, the faith of the whole church “into” our Triune God. The idea of faith “into” comes from the New Testament and the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds themselves. The most frequent way the New Testament describes the nature of our faith is not “faith in” (i.e., giving intellectual assent to), but rather “faith into” (meaning, entrusting ourselves entirely to). That is why the phrasing of the questions preceding each of the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed in the Entrance of this service is “do you entrust your life to” rather than “do you believe in.”

April

April 9	Passion/Palm Sunday New Series Begins: Holy Week through Easter Sunday
April 13	Maundy Thursday
April 14	Good Friday
April 15	Holy Saturday (Full Twitter script with audio links) #holysat17 Great Vigil of Easter Planning Resources Simplified Service
April 16	Easter Sunday
April 23	Festival of God’s Creation New Series Begins: Easter Season (through Pentecost)
April 25	World Malaria Day
April 30	Native American Ministries Sunday

May

<i>All Month</i>	Christian Home Month Asian Pacific American Heritage Month
May 4	National Day of Prayer (USA)

May 5 [May Friendship Day](#)
May 8-14 [Christian Family Week](#)
May 14 [Festival of the Christian Home/Mother's Day \(USA\)](#)
May 21 [Heritage Sunday](#)
May 24 [Aldersgate Day](#)
May 25 [Ascension Day](#)
May 28 [Ascension Sunday \(if transferred\)](#)
May 29 [Memorial Day \(USA\)](#)

June

June 4 [Day of Pentecost \(Easter Season Concludes\)](#)
June 11 [Trinity Sunday](#), [Peace with Justice Sunday](#)
New Series Begins: TBA
June 18 [Father's Day \(USA\)](#)
June 19 [Juneteenth](#)

July

July 4 [Independence Day](#)

September

All Month Season of Creation (2017 resources forthcoming)
September 4 [Labor Day](#) (USA)
September 15-
October 15 [Hispanic Heritage Month](#) (USA)

For Your Planning Team: Living Our Baptismal Calling "NURTURE"

In This Series

Today marks the conclusion of our five-week Lenten series.

Holy Week begins next week, and with it new patterns of both worship and congregational life. Specifically, we will be providing resources for home or small-group use for the weekdays of Holy Week, in addition to full services for the Three Days (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Vigil) and Easter Sunday morning.

For today and through this week, the patterns you have established should remain in place. You gather in worship on Sunday to hear and respond to the final baptismal question and continue with at least two additional opportunities for follow up on that baptismal calling (one on one and in formation group gatherings) throughout the week. You may also have a final Sunday morning or midweek Courageous Conversation event today or this week that models and helps advance work on what it means to be "in union with the church which Christ opens to people of **all** ages, nations, and races."

Keep these patterns going strong this week.

Today

Believing is at the heart of this week's gospel reading. The verb "to believe" shows up consistently throughout the text (verses 15, 25, 26, 27, 40, and 42). He says both to his disciples (verse 15) and to God of the crowd of onlookers at the tomb of Lazarus that he is

doing what he is doing “so that they might believe you have sent me” (v. 42).

In other words, everything that Jesus does in today’s story is aimed at provoking belief. Belief comes, as we have noted before, in several forms. There is belief that something is the case (that you have sent me, verse 42), and belief into persons, entrusting one’s life into their hands (verses 25-26). Ultimately, it is the latter that he seeks the most for his first disciples, Martha, the crowd, and for us.

SIDEBAR: Three Greek Verbs and Their Translation in This Service by Taylor Burton-Edwards

There are three Greek verbs describing strong emotion that I have translated a bit differently than most “standard” translations in this week’s gospel. The three verbs are *klaio*, *dakruo*, and *embrimaomai*.

Klaio and *dakruo* both refer to acts of weeping. *Klaio* typically points to the sound of weeping, and, particularly in contexts of death, to acts of open lamentation. This is the verb John uses to describe what Mary and the religious leaders are doing. I’ve used the English “bewail” to capture the sense of open lamentation this typically describes. *Dakruo* derives from the noun *dakruon*, which means “tear.” It focuses thus less on the sound, and more on the visual signs of deep, internal disturbance. This is the verb that describes what Jesus does when he sees Mary and the others “bemoaning.” I’ve translated it as “teared up and began to weep.”

Embrimaomai describes what Jesus does before he gets to tearing up and weeping (verse 33). And it occurs again when he gets to the tomb (verse 38). Etymologically, the verb points to “snorting like a horse.” The figurative meaning points to an uprising of deep anger or rage. Many English translations tone down these “darker” meanings, and one might argue that mine (“groaned within”) does, too. But groaning has two advantages for this service. One, it at least reflects the depth of feeling and a bit of the sound dynamic of “snorting like a horse” internally. And second, it pairs perfectly with the second line of William Billings’s hymn text “When Jesus Wept” that we use to accompany the reading today. “When Jesus groaned a trembling fear seized all the guilty world around.” This links both the weeping and the groaning to today’s reading, even if the groaning also refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. This kind of double allusion may well have been what Billings had in mind.

END SIDEBAR

The faith we are asked to profess as Christians includes assent that certain things are the case, but is likewise not at all limited to that. In both the Apostles and the Nicene Creeds, indeed, in nearly all Christian creeds written in Latin or Greek, the nature of the belief we are asked to confess is “belief into,” entrusting our lives to the one whose activity among us has been as each article of the creeds describes.

As we have done throughout this series, this service provides four opportunities to encounter and respond to the baptismal question which underlies both worship and formation groups this week. After the opening song set, the pastor asks the congregation the baptismal questions, and the congregation responds in assent, using the words of the baptismal covenant. In the response to the sermon in all are invited to write down in two cards how they currently entrust their lives to each person of the Trinity, and how they will seek to do so better during the coming week. The congregational response also forms the frame of both the prayers of the people and the dismissal.

Additional Resources

[2014 Planning Helps for the Fifth Sunday in Lent](#)

[Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): China, Hong Kong, Macao

FORMATION GROUP NOTES

The patterns for the one hour group meeting should continue as you have established them this week.

If you meet next week (during Holy Week), the focus will of the teaching/testimony time will be on the gospel reading for the day you meet (Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday). Formation group notes for each day in our Holy Week resources will include guidance for a meeting on each day. We encourage the primary focus of the whole church on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil, and Easter Sunday morning be the liturgies for those days or times.

Formation groups may continue with their current participants during Easter Season with a primary focus on formation for ministry. This section during the Easter Season helps will detail a process and focus for each of these group meetings.

Structure for this week:

1. Brief, informal time of gathering (10 minutes) with snacks to share
2. Formal Gathering and Prayer-- seated in a circle in chairs or around a table-- with requests for prayer for the coming week (10 minutes) and prayer led by the group leader or unison in the group.
3. Teaching and Testimony-- (30 minutes)-- For this week, there is one verb (believe) and three main objects of our belief (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Plan to take about 10 minutes for each. Spend no more than 2 minutes teaching about each one (see below), and the remaining time for sharing how each person "believes into" (entrusts their lives) to each person of the Trinity, how each has actively entrusted their lives to each person in the recent past, what has happened because each did, and how each seeks to grow in the capacity to trust and entrust their lives to our Triune God.
4. Blessing and Sending: Gather in a circle or huddle, lay hands on each other, one by one, and pray over each in unison, "X, may you continue to grow in Christ in the days ahead." (5 minutes). Thank all for coming, and send the group out to continue to grow.

TEACHING OVERVIEW:

As we've noted several times throughout these weeks, the phrase that begins each article of the Apostles (and Nicene) creeds, usually translated "believe in" would be better translated, literally, as "believe into." "Believing into" someone means entrusting one's life to someone.

What each article of the creed is really asking then is not whether we give intellectual assent to the idea, for example, that there is a God who created everything. That's assumed, but it's not the main point. The real question behind each article of the creed is whether we are prepared to entrust our lives to a God who, in three persons united in one Being, does or is like what each article of the creed asserts.

TEACHING 1: "I BELIEVE IN GOD, THE FATHER ALMIGHTY"

Translation from the Greek: (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.i.i.html>)

"I believe into God the Father,
the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth."

(Note: There is a comma after Father in the Greek text. It is missing in many English translations which derive more from the Latin than the Greek).

This article identifies the person of God the Father with two additional attributes: "almighty," and "maker of heaven and earth."

To entrust oneself to God the Father, then, is to entrust oneself to one who is both "almighty" and "maker of heaven and earth."

The first of these terms may require some further unpacking. The Greek typically translated as "almighty" (*pantokrator*) is the same word used to translate the Hebrew *Shaddai* in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible that was most widely in use throughout the Roman world at the time of Jesus and the early church.

Pantokrator itself means, most literally, to rule or hold sway (*krator*) over all things (*panto*). Because it has that basic meaning, it has extended meanings of "be as mighty as can be" and even "be conqueror over all." What it translates in the Hebrew, *Shaddai*, which derives from the word for "mountains" or, alternately, "breasts" points in the first case (mountain) to one who is at the pinnacle, on the top of the mountain, and thereby able to dominate the valley and surrounding region, and, in the second (breasts), to the compassion of a nursing mother toward her child. *Shaddai*, in Hebrew, thus carries this idea of one who is at once able to rule over others and who does so with great compassion. That vision of compassion is lost in the translation from Hebrew, where it would have been heard and understood to Greek, where "*krator*" does not have similar roots or cognates.

The Latin and English translations follow the Greek rather than the Hebrew. *Omnipotens* (all-powerful) only captures power without the compassion implied in the Hebrew. *Almighty*, in English, is ultimately a translation of *omnipotens*, and again seems

to exult only in the power of God, or, perhaps more problematically, suggest God's power is completely unlimited, an idea not present in the Hebrew term or early Hebrew theology, but quite compatible with some later Greek (pagan) theistic theologies.

So to entrust one's life to God the Father, who is "almighty," is, via the Hebrew, less a matter of entrusting one's life to an "omnipotent" being who "can" do anything, and much more to entrust one's life to One who is able to govern the created universe, and who does so with compassion. Governing or ruling does not mean having absolute control over everything that happens. Instead, it means taking responsibility for what happens, however it happens, and intervening where needed to put at least some things more right than they had been.

To entrust one's life to God the Father, then, is to entrust one's life to the One who is responsible for all and who uses that responsibility with compassion toward all.

"Maker of heaven and earth." God the Father's rule with compassion over all (pantokrator) is immediately set into further context with the act of having made all things.

Here the Apostles Creed speaks of the universe in a typically Hebraic way, "heaven and earth," all that we can see above and around us, and all that is with us here at the level of this planet. It also describes God as maker, or creator. In Greek and Hebrew, both, there is no real difference between these two English works. The maker or author or creator has an intimate connection with what is made, written, or created. Generally, when we make something and consider it to be good, as God does in the act of creation (Genesis 1), we love it, are proud of it, and hope for it to prosper or bring prosperity. This description of God the Father as maker of heaven and earth thus adds a further dimension to love, feeling, and intimacy to the description of the Father.

When you think of God the Father, what images come to your mind immediately? How do they compare with what the Creed says about God the Father? How does this understanding of what the Creed says help you entrust your life more fully to God the Father?

TEACHING 2: I BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON, OUR LORD

Translation from the Greek:

"And into Jesus Christ, his only-begotten son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
 born from the Mary the Virgin,
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried,
 descended to the depths,
 the third day was raised from the dead,
 ascended into the heavens,

is seated at the right hand God the Father of all power, coming from there to judge the living and the dead.”

To entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ in this article is to entrust our lives to the one who did all the verbs in the long list of verbs in this article: was conceived, born, suffered, crucified, died, buried, descended, raised, ascended, seated, and coming to judge.

It is also to commit ourselves to the same path from our own new birth in baptism to the closing of our days and beyond. As Paul writes in Romans 6:4, “So we have been co-buried with him in baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we ourselves may walk in newness of life.” We move as he did from baptism to suffering for the sake of the good news of God’s kingdom, suffering with those suffering because of the reign of the powers of this world, and suffering in our struggle to witness for God’s reign and for the freedom of all oppressed by the powers of this world. For as Paul also wrote (II Timothy 2:11-12), probably quoting a song or saying already in use by the church in Ephesus:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him.

If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.

If we deny him, he will also deny us.

If we are unbelieving, still he remains faithful, because he cannot deny himself.

So, how do you entrust your life to Jesus in full awareness that doing so may well lead to suffering for the sake of his mission?

TEACHING 3: I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Translation from Greek:

“I believe into the Holy Spirit,
holy catholic church,
communion of the holy ones,
forgiveness of sins,
resurrection of flesh,
life of age to come. Amen.”

In this article of the creed, we entrust our lives to the Holy Spirit, yet seem to say nothing at all about the Holy Spirit beyond the name. That is, unless we see the rest of the items in this article reflecting the work of the Holy Spirit among us here and now.

From that angle, the Holy Spirit gives rise to the church, holy and worldwide. The Holy Spirit makes our communion with one another possible, and makes us holy. The Holy Spirit is the living breath and power for the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit is the agency of the resurrection of our flesh. And the Holy Spirit at work in and through us is the guarantor, guide, and giver of life in the age to come.

So to entrust our lives to the Holy Spirit is to trust our lives also to and with one another in a way that builds community worldwide, a community made possible and sustainable because our chief currency is mercy, the forgiveness of sins.

How are you doing at entrusting your life to the Holy Spirit whose work is like this? How can we help you do this better, more and more?