

Good Enough: Embracing the Imperfections of Life and Faith

*A Worship Design Studio Lent Series based on the work of Kate Bowler,
readings from RCL Year C*



We live in a culture bent on definitions of a good life as continuous upward mobility—climbing ladders of prosperity with increasingly fabulous experiences that we can post to ever-more-likable social media accounts. We may comb the shelves of the self-help section in search of just the right formula to gain success. Perhaps we even gravitate towards spiritual leaders who promise great rewards if we only do “the right thing.” But life happens, right? Most times we are not moving upward but trying to repair the rung we’ve just slipped from. So what if we stopped climbing and started fertilizing, watering, and blooming right where we find ourselves? Welcome to a Lent of affirming a faith in which we are blessed, *regardless*, and where we can lean into embracing our “good enough” lives.

The main visual metaphor for this series is a “ladder garden” as we trade climbing ladders of success for nurturing and tending the life in front of us.

A Blessing for a Joyfully Mediocre Journey

“Blessed are you who realize there is simply not enough—time, money, resources.

Blessed are you who are tired of pretending that raw effort is the secret to perfection.

It’s not. And you know that now.

Blessed are you who need a gentle reminder that even now, even today, God is here, and somehow, that is good enough.”

- from Good Enough: 40’ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. Pre-order this book for your small groups and individuals now as an accompaniment to this worship series at www.katebowler.com/goodenough.

Scriptures and Synopses

Based on RCL, Year C, Gospel lections (NRSV)
(worship scripts also include other lections each week)

*Worship service titles and all this yummy “good enough” theology derives from, and is inspired by the Good Enough devotional book. Get it. Seriously. For everyone.
Thank you - Marcia McFee, Worship Design Studio*

Ash Wednesday

Perfectionism is impossible. Transformation isn't.

"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward... 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." - Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Jesus used the word “hypocrite” to describe those who put on airs in public to make people believe that they were holy, that their religious practice was... well... perfect. But their hearts were actually not in the practice, rather in the rewards that public approval could bring them—which is here today, often gone tomorrow. Sometimes it is life itself that robs us of the shiny, perfect life that we had planned for ourselves. A diagnosis. A broken heart. A lost opportunity. This Lent, rather than change for “the best,” we’ll seek to gain momentum one day at a time, “to reach for a faith that is never perfect, but good enough” (Bowler/Richie).

Lent 1

Ordinary lives can be holy.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" - Luke 4: 1-13

We find ourselves hungry for many things that we believe will bring us satisfaction. The devil lays a bet that Jesus will jump at the chance for glory, fame, and the quick fix. Who wouldn't? But Jesus keeps up the pithy one-liners long enough that the Tempster just has to slink away. What are the temptations that catch your ear, singing out promises that your life should be more special than it is? What if ordinary life is already holy—as is?

Lent 2
So much is out of our control.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” - Luke 13: 31-35

Even Jesus got dang frustrated when folks didn’t behave as he would have liked. We probably aren’t receiving death threats from Herod as Jesus was, but our wellbeing could be threatened by the idea that if we just try hard enough, are nice enough, say just the right thing, life will always go our way. We run around in so many directions, trying to herd the chicks into some imagined semblance of perfect formation (have you ever tried to herd chicks?). What if we could let go of needing all things and all people to be “just so” and instead learn to dance with the unfolding of that which is not ours to control?

Lent 3
Lots of things can be medicine.

Then [Jesus] told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" - Luke 13:1-9

Oh, the shame of the unproductive fig tree. Cut it down! Make room for a more dedicated and hard-working fig tree! Who among us is living up to our fullest potential? The productivity experts these days can diagnose what’s wrong and sell us the antidote in 3 amazing sessions for a low-low price that is guaranteed to turn our lives around. But the gardener offers an alternative medicine—nurture it slowly, letting it soak in the manure all around until it can get the good stuff out of it. Lying fallow and getting fertilized with laughter and tears at the crappy stuff of life can help heal what ails us and that is sometimes productive enough.

Lent 4
We often believe we are the problem.

“I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his

father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. - Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

The Prodigal Son lives high on the hog and then famine strikes in the land of his dream vacation. And so he heads home, tail between his legs, expecting that he has lost it all. To his surprise, his extravagant failure is met with extravagant love and grace. We can be pretty hard on ourselves when things don't go as planned. Guilt, shame, and fear of being seen as a failure can leave us wallowing in the pig pen. Our delusions of a perfectible life keep us disappointed in ourselves. Truth is, life is a big ole risk every single day and facing whatever each day holds is not only good enough, but worthy of love and grace.

Lent 5
We are fragile.

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume... Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." - John 12: 1-8

Jesus speaks the words no one wanted to admit: he was not always going to be around. "Oh, don't say that," so many of us have said to a loved one who speaks the truth about the fragility of life. Perhaps we get uncomfortable because it reveals the precious nature of the present moment, laying bare the beauty and horror of it all. The indescribable pain we know we will one day face invades our senses like a pervasive perfume, inescapable. What if we stopped denying the limited nature of our lives and breathed in deeply the fragrance of vulnerability?

Lent 6 - Palm/Passion Sunday
You are a group project.

As he rode along... the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out." - Luke 19: 28-40

Jesus orchestrated a low-budget parade into a city where he knew his days were numbered. "Get me a colt," he said. Not a steed. Not a float. A young, green donkey (not the color, that's horse-speak for not-ridden-alot-yet). And folks gathered and his friends started some liturgical shouting that ticked off the local priests. Life is hard and we all need friends and sometimes big, loud, praying that will not be messed with. We are created for interdependence. So all our hiding and pretending that we are "perfectly

fine” all on our own just won’t work. Get on the donkey when you need to and let people lay down their cloaks for you and make some noise for you. ‘Cause you know you’ll do it for them too when the chips are down.

Maundy Thursday
We are blessed, regardless.

“Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” - John 13: 1-17, 31b-35

The mid-20th century brought a particular shift as televangelists began to speak of blessing as a “pact” with God in which our good works (mostly our good wallets) would multiply the prosperity in our lives. But for Jesus, this moment in the Upper Room was full of trouble, danger, deception, and uncertainty. Surely Jesus, Son of God, had enough blessing capital to out-manuever this set of circumstances! In the midst of the pain of his moment, Jesus defines the real blessing pact—washing feet, breaking the bread, lifting the cup, sharing even with those who are about to betray him. Love that cannot be quantified reminds us that each and every person is blessed, always, regardless of who we are, how we’ve failed, or what we’ve accomplished.

A Good (Enough) Friday
Even today, God is here and somehow, that is good enough.

They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. - John 18: 1-19;42

Some days are just lousy and that doesn’t even begin to cover it. The first recorded use of “good friday” was in the South English Legendary, a text from 1290. Calling a day “good” was a way to denote a time of holy observance, not judge it as a pretty solid “8” on the scale of fabulousness. What if even our lousiest days could be experienced as a holy observance of the reality that this *is* life? Perhaps the “good news” in the midst of the devastation is that God is buried with us in our deepest pain, wrapping us, holding us until we can move through that birth canal once again into renewed life.

Easter Vigil/Easter Sunday
A Good Enough Faith

They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). - John 20: 1-18

Easter is tricky when it comes to faith. We come for the happy ending—the “and then they lived happily ever after.” The resurrection story proclaims hope over despair and life over death, yet we know that life continued, and continues for us, as a story of spiking heartbreak moments that are not forever fixed. The nature of being created for love is that we will always hunger for more, that there is never enough life and love to satisfy. And endings are often too soon. But perhaps a good enough faith is one that moves through the chronic nature of being incurably human with an eye for resurrection moments that assure us that this good enough life is worthy of our amazement.

I hope this helps you get an at-a-glance feel for the theme!

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