

Roll Down, Justice! (Lent)



***I hate, I reject your festivals;
I don't enjoy your joyous assemblies.
If you bring me your entirely burned offerings and gifts of food —
I won't be pleased;
I won't even look at your offerings of well-fed animals.
Take away the noise of your songs;
I won't listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
— Amos 5: 21-24 (CEB)***

Lent is a time of reminding ourselves who we are called to be in this world. Our Lenten series is inspired by Amos, a prophet whose message is that God calls us to let “justice roll down like waters.” Worship without justice is not acceptable, rather our songs must move us to action on behalf of the oppressed. Through the powerful music of Mark Miller and the remembrance of our rituals of baptism (the origins of Lent), this season will offer us reflection and renewed inspiration to let our voices be turned to the heart of the Gospel —

proclaiming God's love for all people. What prejudices are we challenged to "give up" as a Lent practice of abstinence, and further, how are we willing to "give" of ourselves for the sake of the world?

Listen to the theme song here: <https://vimeo.com/125422640> (starts at :52)

Ash Wednesday — Make Me an Instrument of Peace: Re-Cognition

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The season of Lent begins with a call to repent, which means to "turn around." This year, we will turn from our apathy, turn from simply "going through the motions" of our life and worship. Instead we will pray to be active instruments of peace, agents of change in the world. We begin the journey toward renewing our baptismal identity as the hands and feet of Christ by "re-cognizing" — tuning our minds and hearts toward the world and its peoples.

Listen to a choral version of the feature song here: <https://listeninglab.stantons.com/title/make-me-an-instrument-of-peace/434126/>
This choral title is available on Mark's store at markamillermusic.com.

Week One — Child of God: Naming Each One

So what are we going to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? [God] didn't spare [God's] own Son but gave him up for us all. Won't [God] also freely give us all things...?

Who will bring a charge against God's elect people? It is God who acquits them. Who is going to acquit them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God's right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

We are being put to death all day long for your sake.

We retreated like sheep for slaughter.

But in all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us. I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created. — Romans 8: 31-39 (CEB)

In our baptismal rituals, we take a special moment to repeat the precious name of the person being baptized. In a world that seems obsessed with who is “right and wrong,” “good or bad,” “in or out,” or on “this side or that side,” it is a radical endeavor to name each person as “Child of God” — no matter what people say. This, indeed, is where love of the other begins... love for the self, as God loves us.

Listen to the choral version of the feature song here: <https://vimeo.com/145909282>

Week Two — How Long: Renouncing Evil

How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

*How long will I be left to my own wits,
agony filling my heart? Daily?*

How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

Look at me!

*Answer me, Lord my God!
Restore sight to my eyes!
Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, "I won!"
My foes will rejoice over my downfall.
But I have trusted in your faithful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
Yes, I will sing to the Lord
because the Lord has been good to me. — Psalm 13 (CEB)*

Over half of the liturgical songs of the Israelites were Psalms of Lament. Penned in a time of exile and persecution, these were poets trying to give voice to the pain of the people. Today we lament the injustice of our time and yet, like the Psalms of Lament, we end in praise anyway for “God is good, all the time.” We remember that even and especially in times of despair, through our baptism we are given the “freedom and power to resist evil in all its forms” as we “put our whole trust in God.” How will we put these words into action to show hope to the world?

Listen to the feature song here: <https://www.r2hub.org/library/lenten-study-session-2-how-long>

Week Three — I Dream of a Church: Christ's Representatives

“Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

“Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

“Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’” — Matthew 25: 31-40 (CEB)

At our baptism, we promise to nurture others and are reminded that we are to “serve as Christ’s representatives in the world.” Today we ask the question, “do we as the church look and act like Jesus?” Our song of justice today invites us to dream of a church “where justice is flowing with hope and peace growing.” What thoughts and behaviors do we need to shed in order to make room for hope and peace to grow in and through our lives and this church?

Listen to Mark’s band version of the feature song here: https://youtu.be/a_PmVUKX5j8

Week Four — I Choose Love: Communities of Forgiveness

They also led two other criminals to be executed with Jesus. When they arrived at the place called The Skull, they crucified him, along with the criminals, one on his right hand and the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.” They drew lots as a way of dividing up his clothing.

The people were standing around watching, but the leaders sneered at him, saying, “He saved others. Let him save himself if he really is the Christ sent from God, the chosen one.”

The soldiers also mocked him. They came up to him, offering him sour wine and saying, “If you really are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” Above his head was a notice of the formal charge against him. It read “This is the king of the Jews.”

One of the criminals hanging next to Jesus insulted him: “Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!” Responding, the other criminal spoke harshly to him, “Don’t you fear God, seeing the you’ve also been sentenced to die? We are rightly condemned, for we are receiving the appropriate sentence for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus replied, “I assure you that today you will be with me in paradise.” — Luke 23: 32-43

Each time someone is baptized, the whole church body gathered also makes vows. One of the things we promise is to be a community of love and forgiveness. Each day we must choose between letting the difficult things about life create resentment in us or allowing the work of forgiveness to make way for love. Our song of justice this week was written as a response to a modern-day act of forgiveness that reminds us of the power of Jesus’ forgiveness, even on the cross.

Listen to the choral version of the feature song here: <https://www.jwpepper.com/I-Choose-Love/10661699.item#/>

Week Five — God Has Work for Us to Do: Faithful Disciples

Isn’t this the fast I choose:

*releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,
setting free the mistreated,
and breaking every yoke?*

Isn’t it sharing your bread with the hungry

*and brining the homeless poor into your house,
covering the naked when you see them,
and not hiding from your own family?*

*Then your light will break out like the dawn,
and you will be healed quickly.*

*Your own righteousness will walk before you,
and the Lord’s glory will be your rear guard.*

*Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and God will say, “I’m here.”*

If you remove the yoke from among you,

*the finger-pointing, the wicked speech;
if you open your heart to the hungry,
and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted,
your light will shine in the darkness,
and your gloom will be like the noon.*

*The Lord will guide you continually
and provide for you, even in parched places.
He will rescue your bones.*

*You will be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water that won't run dry.*

*They will rebuild ancient ruins on your account;
the foundations of generations past you will restore.*

*You will be called Mender of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Livable Streets. — Isaiah 58: 6-12 (CEB)*

Our featured scripture this week speaks of being a “well-watered garden like a spring of water that won't run dry.” Baptismal waters continue to feed the streams of justice as we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us every time we set our hands and feet to the work God has for us to do. As we break bread today, we remember that as long as there are those who are hurting, hungry, excluded and oppressed, we are called to be faithful disciples, setting a table and inviting all to the feast.

Listen to the choral version of the feature song here: <https://youtu.be/MAncm97r4Kk>

Week Six — The Day Is Coming: We Are One

*The desert and the dry land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus.*

*They will burst into bloom,
and rejoice with joy and singing.*

*They will receive the glory of Lebanon,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon.*

*They will see the Lord's glory,
the splendor of our God.*

*Strengthen the weak hands,
and support the unsteady knees. — Isaiah 35: 1-3 (CEB)*

When they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave two disciples a task. He said to them, “Go into the village over there. As soon as you enter, you will find a donkey tied up and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to me. If anybody says anything to you, say that the Lord needs it.” He sent them off right away. Now this happened to fulfill what the prophet said, “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘Look, your king is coming to you, humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt the donkey’s offspring.’” The disciples went and did just as Jesus had ordered them. They brought the donkey and the colt and laid their clothes on them. Then he sat on them.

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” And when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up. “Who is this?” they asked. The crowds answered, “It’s the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.” — Matthew 21: 1-11 (CEB)

The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem was a vision of a coming day when power is displayed not with military might but through the solidarity of all people in the name of love and justice. We pray this day for a time when we are one and we support one another on the road of life, not tear one another down because of our differences. We will affirm our oneness with the whole human family this day.

Listen to the feature song here: <https://www.r2hub.org/library/lenten-study-session-6-the-day-is-coming>

Holy Week Vigil — Traveling Companions: Journey to the Water

*Just like a deer that craves streams of water,
my whole being craves you, God.
My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God.*

*When will I come and see God's face?
My tears have been my food both day and night,
as people constantly questioned me,
"Where's your God now?"
But I remember these things as I bare my soul:
how I made my way to the mighty one's abode,
to God's own house,
with joyous shouts and thanksgiving songs —
a huge crowd celebrating the festival!
Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed?
Why are you so upset inside?
Hope in God!
Because I will again give thanks,
my saving presence and my God.
My whole being is depressed.
That's why I remember you
from the land of Jordan and Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.
Deep called to deep at the noise of your waterfalls;
all your massive waves surged over me.
By day the Lord commands his faithful love;
by night his song is with me —
a prayer to the God of my life.
I will say to God, my solid rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why do I have to walk around,
sad, oppressed by enemies?"
With my bones crushed, my foes make fun of me,
constantly questioning me: "Where's your God now?"
Why, I ask myself, are you so depressed?
Why are you so upset inside?
Hope in God!
Because I will again give him thanks,
my saving presence and my God. — Psalm 42 (CEB)*

[also includes the Passion Narrative and other readings]

Holy Week is a time to mourn when love is crucified on the cross of fear and hate. We bring the story of Jesus into reflection with the story of our world in which this continues. And yet, that is not the end of the story. Our

Lenten journey heightens and culminates in a journey to the waters of baptismal renewal in the dark of night. The earliest Christian communities saw this time of the year as the ultimate time for baptisms because this was when Christ died and was raised — just as we die to the old and rise again to new life through our baptisms. Drawing on the ancient Vigil ritual that incorporates Light, Water, Word and Table, we will go on a pilgrimage as traveling companions through the church, offering us a deeply moving experience of our faith story then and now.

Listen to “Christ Has Broken Down the Walls” here: <https://youtu.be/SdLsRoV9CI0>

Easter Sunday — Welcome: The New Jerusalem

*At that time, declares the Lord,
I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people.*

*The Lord proclaims:
The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness.
As Israel searched for a place of rest,
the Lord appeared to them from a distance:*

*I have loved you with a love that lasts forever.
And so with unfailing love,
I have drawn you to myself.*

*Again, I will build you up,
and you will be rebuilt, virgin Israel.
Again, you will play your tambourines
and dance with joy.*

*Again, you will plant vineyards
on the hills of Samaria;
farmers will plant and then enjoy the harvests.*

*The time will come when
the watchmen will shout from*

*the highlands of Ephraim:
“Get ready! We’re going up to Zion
to the Lord our God!” — Jeremiah 31: 1-6*

[also includes the resurrection narrative]

This is the day we proclaim that justice does indeed roll down in a stream of love that cannot be stopped! No matter what, we will continue to work to invite and welcome all people to “a city built of love and light, the new Jerusalem.” For it is in walking together, talking together and dreaming together that we are all saved from the things of death and made heirs to life as we create a better, safer, and more hospitable world.

Listen to “Welcome” here: <https://youtu.be/nH64DtCDDMU>