



LENT

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

And so he was raised on a cross, and a title was fixed, indicating who it was who was being executed. Painful it is to say, but more terrible not to say... He who suspended the earth is suspended, he who fixed the heavens is fixed, he who fastened all things is fastened to the wood; the Master is outraged; God is murdered.

*Melito of Sardis
(d. c. A.D. 180)*

HOPE BROOKLYN,

This Lenten season is an opportunity for reflection, spiritual growth, and deeper connection with our faith and our community. As we approach the sacred season of Lent, we will embark on a transformative 40-day journey together.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- **Daily Meditations:** Engage in daily reflections, scripture readings, and prayer prompts that will serve as a guide into formation over the next forty days.
- **Weekly Gatherings:** Come together every Sunday at 2pm for prayer, worship, community, and the reading and proclaiming of God's word. We are journeying *together*.
- **Prayer Room and Worship Nights:** Practice being with Jesus along with others in a contemplative space for worship and prayer. *Starting February 14th after our Ash Wednesday service.*

WHY JOIN?

The Lenten journey provides a space for us to grow individually and collectively, deepening our walk with Jesus. We look forward to sharing this sacred season together and witnessing the collective impact of observing the Lenten season and participating in the journey of Lent.

START DATE: Ash Wednesday, February 14th

END DATE: Easter Sunday, March 31st

LENT 2024: AN INTRODUCTION

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

ESAU MCCALLEY

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a service known for the imposition of ashes. As clergy mark the foreheads of the faithful, we tell them, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." We tell them they are going to die.

I remember serving as a priest on Ash Wednesday after I was married and had small children. Kids get excited about everything in church that's different from the norm, so the idea of coming down the aisle to receive something new thrilled them. Instead of Communion they got their foreheads marked with ashes. I experienced something far from excitement or joy. I looked at my wife and two young children and told them words that broke me. I told them they would return to dust, and as a symbol of that returning, I marked their foreheads with ashes in the shape of the cross.

In the Bible, ashes are a sign of mourning and loss. When Xerxes issued a command to kill all the Jews in his kingdom, the Israelites responded in the following way: "In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in "sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3). The link between mourning and ashes is well established in the Scriptures (see Daniel 9:3; Jeremiah 6:26; Job 42:6; Matthew 11:21).

The liturgy makes a second connection as well, one that goes beyond the symbols of repentance found in biblical depictions of mourning. It takes us back to the origin of all our pain. Ash Wednesday evokes the punishment arising from the fall, when God says to Adam and Eve, "Dust you are and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). In other words, the sadness of Lent is not a general sadness about the inevitability of death but an explicitly Christian diagnosis of the cause of death. We sin and die because humanity rebelled against God. There is nothing natural at all about death. It is an alien intrusion into the good world God created. It is an enemy to be defeated. On Ash Wednesday we remember that we will die, but we do not accept it as the inevitable reality of the human experience. Even in our acknowledgement of death there are hints of our rebellion against it.

We sin and die because we are born in the aftermath of the rebellion of our first parents. Adam and Eve rebelled because they wanted to be like God and were led away by their desire (Genesis 3:5-6). They believed the serpent's lie and disobeyed God's command (Genesis 3:13). This rebellion had implications that spread out in multiple directions, including engendering a new distrust of each other (Genesis 3:7) and of God (Genesis 3:8-9).

Through the imposition of ashes, Ash Wednesday reminds us that death and sin cannot be completely separated. This does not mean a particular form of death is punishment for specific sins, but sin and death are partners.

But if the ashes of Ash Wednesday point us toward the link between sin, death, and rebellion, they also contain something else, something more important than everything we have seen thus far. The ashes are in the shape of the cross. That cross carries within it an entire story and the foundation of human hope. It is the story and the foundation of human hope. It is the story of loss and gain, of the incarnation of the truly good one, his glorious life and triumphant defeat of death. The ashes are not just a reminder of our great failure; they remind us of God's victory over sin and death through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son.

In the garden after our first great disobedience, God did not give an immediate death sentence. He spared Adam and Eve, and he clothed them (Genesis 3:21). God's grace stayed his judgment. The human story would go forward. God also made a prophecy about the offspring of the woman, saying:

*I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel. (Genesis 3:15)*

Christians have called this the protoevangelium, the first preaching of the gospel. Christ is the one born of woman who crushes the head of the serpent and brings about the salvation of humanity. The offspring of the serpent (the sons of evil) are at enmity with the sons of the light. The ashes on our forehead remind us that even as we continue our slow march toward death, we serve the one who has already defeated the enemy that stalks us. ■

PRAYER

*In thy word, Lord, is my trust,
To thy mercies fast I fly;
Though I am but clay and dust,
Yet thy grace can lift me high.*

*Thomas Campion
(English, 1567-1620)*

SCRIPTURE

Joel 2:15-17

Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast,
call a sacred assembly.

Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders,
gather the children,
those nursing at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.

Let the priests, who minister before the Lord,
weep between the portico and the altar.

Let them say, "Spare your people, Lord.

Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?

Joel 2:13

"Rend your heart
and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity."

Matthew 6:1-6

"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Isaiah 58:2-8

“For day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right
and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask me for just decisions
and seem eager for God to come near them.
‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
‘and you have not seen it?’
Why have we humbled ourselves,
and you have not noticed?’

Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

ADDITIONAL READING

Our Lenten guide will contain readings and reflections from the following sources:

1. Zondervan Publishing. (2018). The Holy Bible New International Version. August.
2. Rutledge, F. (2017). The Crucifixion: Understanding The Death of Jesus Christ. Eerdmans Publishing.
3. Lewis, C.S., & Various Contributors. (2003). Bread and Wine Readings for Lent and Easter. Plough Publishing.
4. Wright, N.T. (2013). Lent for Everyone Year A. Westminster John Knox Press.
5. Wangerin Jr., W. (1992). Reliving the Passion. Zondervan Publishing.
6. Authur, S. (2016). Between Midnight and Dawn: A Literary Guide to Prayer for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Tide. Paraclete Press.
7. Episcopal Church. (2016). The Book of Common Prayer. Good Books Pub.
8. McCaulley E. (2022). Lent: The Season of Repentance and Renewal. InterVarsity Press.
9. Rutledge, F. (2004). The Last Seven Words from the Cross. Eerdmans Pub.
10. Rutledge, F. (2005). The Undoing of Death. Eerdmans Pub.

