

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT WORSHIP

Sara Webb Phillips

When our staff team plans out worship services, we first look at the liturgical season as a whole. What is it we want to have happen in our own lives and for others during this period of time? How do we enhance the worship to speak to what God would have us become? In Lenten planning, we tone down the mood of our worship, to become more reflective, so as to make the contrast with an explosive Easter Vigil and Easter morning even more joyous.

In that spirit, we use purple cloth to drape our baptismal font and Christ candle, symbolic of dry, dark times. We do not schedule any baptisms during Lent; rather Lent is when we hold Inquirer's Classes for faith exploration, and prepare our youth confirmands and others for baptism. (We then use the Easter Vigil service as the time to receive new members and baptize any persons coming to the faith.) We incorporate liturgical dance in an understated way, providing movement to a scripture reading, psalm setting or anthem. One Lent we "grew" a banner. Each week we pinned on prayer crosses with concerns written on the back. The banner was processed into worship for a front visual. We incorporated it into every service throughout Lent and Holy Week. Another year, our after-worship hospitality team decided not to serve coffee; rather they had bottles of water and simple cheeses and crackers as understated foods over which to share in fellowship.

Several years ago in Louisville, Kentucky, across from the Wayside Christian Mission was a "Cross Museum" with thousands of crosses on display. It no longer exists, but it is an interesting idea. Perhaps as a Lenten theme, the congregation could be invited to bring a variety of crosses to either have on the altar during Lent or in the gathering/entrance space of the church as a visual of this season of the cross.

We also use the change of the liturgical season to do different things in worship. We follow the Word and Table pattern so that the congregation is comfortable with the structure of our liturgy, then we vary components to emphasize particular aspects in worship. If you do not regularly include a prayer of confession, reciting a creed, singing the psalm, music from other traditions, or using all four scripture lessons, those might be parts of worship to consider inserting into your Lenten Sunday

pattern. This might be a time to introduce more congregational response. The collect can begin with "The Lord be with you," with the congregation responding "And also with you." Perhaps you would want to consider a format of Prayers of the People that uses a response such as the leader saying "Lord in your mercy," with the congregation responding, "Hear our prayer." Following the prayers, the sharing of the Peace might also be included. This would not be a time of greeting to say hello to neighbors, but the quiet intention of wishing God's deepest shalom for those seated close by. One might also consider including a "Response to the Word" through personal testimonies, saying a creed, adding a minute for mission, or introducing a new hymn and singing it each of the six weeks.

Because The United Methodist Church currently has an appointed committee to study the issue of Holy Communion in worship, and since that group has endorsed more frequent communion for United Methodists worldwide, the Lenten season could be a time when the congregation experiences weekly communion or an every other week celebration of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps a sermon series on the sacrament could draw together the themes of sharing and sacrifice, cross and celebration, anticipating Maundy Thursday's table fellowship, and (hopefully) the sacrament on Easter.

If you have a bulletin format that lends itself to a text or graphic for reflection, you may wish to design such touches into the season. There are many wonderful published prayers and brief meditations from which to choose. Remember to seek permission from the publisher to use copyrighted material, whether text or graphics.

Planning for the second Sunday in Lent offers many possibilities to highlight themes of Lent: repentance, trust in God, and spiritual renewal. The texts for Lent 2 address these issues:

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 God comes to Abraham and restates the promise that, through him, the nations will be blessed. Through the generations to come, God's covenant will be everlasting.

Psalm 22 David tells of the coming Messiah's glory and suffering. He gives praise to God and proclaims that salvation is offered to all.

Romans 4:13-25 Paul recalls the example of Abraham and Sarah as a response to God and interprets that righteousness as coming from faith. So, too the Romans are also called to righteousness by the practice of faith in Jesus who “was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.”
Mark 8:31-38 Jesus foretells his death and resurrection to the disciples, and rebukes Peter’s idea that his mission can be accomplished without suffering. He then calls them and the

crowd to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him.

What follows are suggestions for Sunday worship based on Lent 2 in Year B. Hymns with three numbers are from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, with four numbers from *The Faith We Sing*, and numbers marked with GP2 are from *Global Praise II*, ST Kimbrough, Jr. and Carlton Young, editors. (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, 2000.)

Gathering

Use the moments before the service to give any announcements about the service, rehearse any music within the service, sing gathering music or choruses (such as “Sanctuary” 2164, “Into My Heart” 2160, “As Your Children Lord” GP2 5) and call the congregation to attentiveness to prepare for worship. A prelude could follow. Here’s an example: “Welcome to worship this morning. The reason we don’t sell tickets to our worship is because we don’t want spectators. God calls us, not as an audience to judge the value of worship, but as a congregation, responsible for worship. We prepare our hearts and minds as we move into this worship to ask ‘Here I am Lord, how do you want me to live in your love this week?’ We are glad you’re here. Let us worship God.”

Greeting

I encourage using scripture as the opening words, spoken by the worship leader or responsively with the congregation. You may wish to use this season to familiarize a scripture text by using the same opening each week. Examples would be:

Create in us clean hearts, O God,
And renew right spirits within us.
Restore to us the joy of your salvation:
Uphold us with your Spirit. (From Psalm 51:10)

Return to me, says the Lord, with all your heart; rend your hearts and not your clothing.
Return to the Lord, for God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. (From Joel 2:13)

Or you may wish to draw from the psalm of the day:

Let us give our praise in the great congregation.
Let us pay our vows and worship the Lord.
Let all who fear the Lord give praise!
The children of God stand in awe. (Based on Psalm 22)

Particularly appropriate if the Lord’s Supper is observed:
From God comes my praise in the great congregation:
My vows I will pay before those who fear God.
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
And all the nations shall bow before God.

Entrance Hymn

The God of Abraham Praise 116 (Genesis)
Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus 325 (Genesis, Romans, Mark)
There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy 121 (Psalm, Genesis)
A Mighty Fortress 110 (A good Lenten choice)

Collect

This opening prayer is a time to highlight the worship we offer in the name of the trinity, thus framing the service at the beginning and at the end (through the benediction), with the triune name. Examples might be:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray:

Almighty and merciful God, it is not your will that sinners should perish, but that their sins should die: Restrain your anger which we deserve, and pour out upon us your mercy for which we ask, that through this we might pass from mourning to joy;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.

Or the Lenten Collect 268, or Prayers from the Book of Worship, 333-337.

Call to Confession and Pardon

If you are not having Holy Communion, you may wish to put a Prayer of Confession here:

Let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Most Merciful God, We confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the good news . . . you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Glory to God. Amen!

A pardon more specific to the lectionary readings:

Hear the good news! Like Abraham’s faith in God, our faith can be counted for the good because Jesus was given up to death for our misdeeds and raised from the dead to justify us in the sight of God. Believe the good news! In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

First Reading Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

Psalm 22

Responsive Reading with sung antiphon 752.

Or use a verse and response setting from the *Grail Gelineau Psalter* or other settings from G.I.A. Publications, Chicago.

Second Reading Romans 4:13-25

Children's Time

Here is a suggestion based on the Gospel lesson. You may wish to follow the Gospel Lesson with the children's time, so that the scripture is heard first. In our congregation this pattern works better.

"How to Gain by Losing"

(Have two ice cubes, a glass of water and paper towels.)

Jesus says "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will save it." Isn't that backwards? When you save something don't we keep it, not lose it? Well, let's see. I want to save this ice cube. So I will put it in my pocket. (Wrap in towel and put away.) What do you know will happen?

Now, I'll take the second ice cube and put it in the water. What will happen to it? But what purpose does its melting have? So even though it is lost, it really served its purpose. We too, can live our lives apart from others or we give ourselves for others by sharing what we have. What we give, we gain, because it becomes part of other people. We give our lives to help others because Christ gave his life to help us. Because he gave his life, he saved ours.

Gospel Acclamation

Sung acclamations before and after the Gospel reading could be:

Live in Charity 2179

Thy Word Is a Lamp unto my Feet (refrain only) 601

I Know Your Word Is a Map to my Feet GP2 33

Your Word Will Be a Lamp GP2 32

Gospel Reading Mark 8:31-38

Response to the Word

The Response to the Word could be a hymn, a creed, or a brief testimony to some mission project the church sponsors.

Suggested hymns:

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing 400 (Genesis)

O Love, How Deep 267 (Romans)

Where He Leads Me 338 (Mark)

Take Up Thy Cross 415

O Wondrous Sight 258

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross 298

Lord I Lift Your Name on High 2088

Prayers of the People

In our congregation, the prayer leader mentions specific concerns and joys of the congregation briefly. Then we sing a prayer song, such as "O Lord Hear Our Prayer" 2200, "Jesus, Remember Me" 488, "Come and Fill our Hearts" 2157, *I Lift My Eyes to You, God*" GP2 44, or "Let My Prayer Rise" GP2 51.

Everlasting God, you do not hide your face from those who call upon you. We lift our praise as part of the families of nations on earth and we worship you.

If you do not include a confessional prayer in the service, here is a suggestion of how to include it in this prayer form:

You declared a covenant with Abraham that was offered to all who would call upon your Name. You promised us an everlasting heritage in calling us to walk before you blamelessly. But we have not been fruitful in our works; we have denied your truth and failed to take up our cross in obedience to your word. Hear our confessions we offer silently at this time. (Pause) Give us your mercy and forgive us, O Lord. Teach us what it means to be on the side of denial of selfish ambitions, desires, and goals, seeing success in service rather than in acquiring possessions and power. Fill us with your Holy Spirit that we may proclaim your deliverance and tell of your mercy to coming generations.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Today many suffer from illness of body or mind or culture. Hear these prayers we offer:

For the church universal to which we belong, that we may make strong the ties that bind us together, and live up to the high calling that is ours in Christ Jesus; for our bishop (*name*), our superintendent (*name*), our pastor (*name*), and all pastors, teachers, and leaders of the church; for the daily work of this congregation seeking to be faithful:

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the peoples of the world; for an end to war, poverty, and oppression, especially for (e.g., India and Pakistan); For our nation, for more understanding of differences—racial, ethnic, social, economic and religious, that we may attain a greater harmony in our common life and less violence on our streets; for safety to all who defend the common good:

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the sick, the dying, the grieving, and the troubled; for the medical community and caregivers whose vocations are for healing; especially we pray for (*name*), and for those whose names we call out loud at this time: (Pause)

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of eternity, Christ for all times, we rejoice in the communion of saints who from the time of Abraham and Sarah have worshiped you and brought up their children to trust you: Hear these prayers we offer in the name of the one who will come in glory, Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

This may a season to use the ecumenical text of the Lord's Prayer found in the hymnal on 894. We would do well to acquaint our congregations with its wording, but I would not use it during Holy Week, on Easter, or other highly emotional services, until it is a familiar pattern to them. Consider using a responsively sung version of the prayer, 271 or 2278.

Offertory

Lent can be a time to emphasize missional giving. Resource bulletin inserts are available for a variety of advance special giving. Maybe during this season you can institute a moment for mission to highlight local projects, and encourage extra-mile giving..

Offertory invitation based on the lectionary:

Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose themselves for Christ's sake and for the gospel will be saved. We are

Possible Sermon Titles

Possible Impossibilities—Despite all odds, God’s promise is fulfilled. Paul calls it “hoping against hope.” (Rom 4:18) The disciples see the suffering Messiah as an impossibility. Yet meeting the demands of discipleship have become possible through Christ.

Seeing Through Eyes of Faith—Contrast how Abraham came to see, how the disciples didn’t see, missing how the Messiah was to suffer.

The Name Game (playing off of the 1960s song) or **Name Change**—The significance of a new name, Abraham, Sarah, Peter, is given because of their faith experience. We receive the new name of Christian in our baptism.

Focus on Faith—Link Genesis and Romans with Abraham’s act of faithfulness, and Jesus’ challenge to the disciples to trust the concept of the suffering Messiah. “What God has promised, God has the power to do.” (From *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, p. 33.)

Out of the Blue—Abraham’s chosenness and Jesus’ first passion prediction come “out of the blue.” Abraham responds with faith; the disciples are caught off guard.

Cross Words or Crosses, Not Conquests—Jesus and Peter cross in the meaning of the concept of Messiah.

Finders Keepers, Losers Finders—How life in Christ with all its sacrifices provides more abundant life in this world, and in the next.

invited to give all we have and all we are to the realization of God’s will among us. A portion of that we bring today as our offering.

Offertory prayer:

Matchless Giver, receive our offerings of ourselves and our possessions, insignificant beside the gift of Christ, but precious to you as signs of our obedient cross-bearing hallowed by the Spirit. **Amen.**

The Great Thanksgiving

*If you continue with Holy Communion
Communion Liturgy UMH 12 ff.*

Communion hymns:

Take Up Thy Cross 415 (Mark)

Beneath the Cross of Jesus 297 (Mark)

Sending Hymn

Are Ye Able 530 (Mark)

Standing on the Promises 374 (Romans)

More Love to Thee, O Christ 453
(Genesis)

We’ve a Story to Tell To the Nations 569
(Genesis, Mark)

O Master Let Me Walk With Thee 430
Lord of All Hopefulness 2197

Jesus, And Shall It Ever Be (Mark) from
AMEC Bicentennial Hymnal 288

Benediction

The God of all grace, who has called us to eternal glory in Christ, establish you and strengthen you by the power of the Holy Spirit, that you may live in grace and peace.

or

Go forth in peace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

Or any other Trinitarian benediction.

Choral Response

*A piece by the choir or a chorus sung together
with the congregation*

Sent Out in Jesus’ Name 2184

Song of Hope 2186

May the Love of the Lord GB2 61

May God Bless Us GB2 73

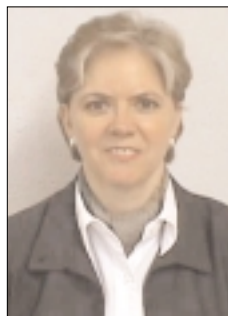
Resources:

And Also With You: Worship Resources based on the Revised Common Lectionary Year B. Timothy J. Crouch, Nancy B. Crouch, Chris E. Visminar, Mark R. Babb. Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 1996.

Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary. Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Prayers for the Seasons of God’s People: Worship Aids for the Revised Common Lectionary Year B. David Hostetter. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.

The Gospel for Kids Series B. Eldon Weisheit. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978.



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