



SET FREE *By Truth*

Ash Wednesday

"Return to me with all your heart"

JOEL 2:1-2 12-17 PSALM 51:1-17 2 CORINTHIANS 5:20B-6:10 MATTHEW 6:1-6, 16-21

We are created out of love and for love. We walk the same earth and breathe the same air, and yet...

We proclaim that it is God's will that all people live in equity and peace, that all have a share in God's abundant life, that there is liberty and justice for all, and yet...

We have been claimed in baptism, buried with Christ in a death like his, to be raised with Christ in a resurrection like his. We have already died the only death that really matters, and yet...

We do not recognize the full humanity of others.

There is not justice for all. In our fear we doubt the resurrection.

This Lent, let us enter into a time and space of honest and unflinching examination. We offer these devotions as a means, a starting point for prayer and reflection. The hard work of truth telling and truth hearing is set before us. The painful reality that racial equity does not exist in our countries our churches cannot be ignored. We must resist any rush to reconciliation before repentance. Return to the Lord.

*Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Prayer

In your love, compassionate God, keep us in this tension.
In your severe mercy see this pain to bring action and change.
We pray this through Christ our Lord,
in whom the dividing wall of hostility has already been broken down. Amen.



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Lent I

“An appeal to God for a good conscience”

GENESIS 9:8-17 PSALM 25: 1-10 I PETER 3: 18-22 MARK 1: 9 – 15

In the midst of two stories we know so well, the story of Noah and the flood and the story of Jesus and his baptism we hear in the First Letter of Peter some teaching about the nature of our baptism. He speaks of it “not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience through Christ.” (I Peter 3:21)

Lent is a time for us to be especially mindful of any and every arrogance reflecting the thought that some peoples are superior to others. I speak of the sins of racism, ethnic cleansing, and government-enforced policies of assimilation designed “to remake others in our image”. (The Anglican Church of Canada’s Apology to the survivors of the Indian Residential Schools in Canada, 1993)

Lent is a season to confess these sins against our brothers and sisters. It is a time to correct attitudes, words, and actions, blatant or subtle that perpetuate them. It is a time to forge new relationships grounded in our baptismal vow to strive for justice and peace among all people.

To quote First Peter, Lent is a season of “appeal to God for a good conscience”, cleansed of the sins of prejudice, and cleared for respect and affection, one for another in accord with the Gospel we proclaim.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz
Anglican Church of Canada

Prayer

“For all false judgements, for uncharitable thoughts toward our neighbours and for our prejudice and contempt toward those who differ from us, Accept our repentance, Lord.”

(The Litany of Penitence for Ash Wednesday, The Book of Alternative Services,
The Anglican Church of Canada)



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Lent 2

“Take up their cross and follow me”

GENESIS 17:1-7, 15-16 PSALM 22:23-31 ROMANS 4:13-25 MARK 8:31-38

“Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

A big part of taking up the cross of Jesus is being willing to speak out against injustice and hatred. In Canada, hate crimes against Jews, Muslims, indigenous people, black people, as well as against others, continue to grow. The year 2017 began with a violent mass shooting that left six men dead at a Quebec City mosque.

As a church and as individuals, we need to continue to speak out against all forms of hatred and to build bridges with people of all faiths. Following Jesus requires us to speak a clear message of love, respect, tolerance and understanding.

National Bishop Susan Johnson
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Prayer

Jesus, in the face of hatred and intolerance, give to us the courage and commitment to speak out for peace and love and stand with our neighbours. Amen.



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Lent 3

“But we proclaim Christ crucified”

EXODUS 20:1-17 PSALM 19 I CORINTHIANS 1:18-25 JOHN 2:13-22

Some things just don't make much sense. Water doesn't become wine, bread and fish do not suddenly multiply, the lame do not jump up and walk. And most certainly, dead people stay dead, especially those who experience the horrific death of crucifixion!

And yet, where Jesus is involved, all kinds of things that don't make much sense...happen.

In those earliest years of the Jesus Movement, his followers didn't wear crosses around their necks or hang them in the homes in which they worshipped. They had other symbols, certainly, but not crosses. Crucifixion was not a historical curiosity, but a still-present reality, and an agonizing and shameful one at that. To be crucified was to be executed as a common criminal. Worse, according to the Hebrew Scriptures, cursed was one who hung on a tree, on the wood of a cross.

So to speak of “Christ crucified” didn't make sense to many. It was a stumbling block, something foolish or offensive. But Paul said otherwise. Yes, Jesus could have avoided the cross, found some other way around it. But instead he faced the worst the world could throw at him, and then broke through death itself, and leave an empty cross behind as witness to his astonishing victory.

Some things don't make much sense. The cross is one of them. But it stands now and forever as our rallying cry that God—not injustice, not suffering, not even death—has the final, victorious word.

*Presiding Bishop Michael Curry
The Episcopal Church*

Prayer

“Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace.”

(Prayer for Mission, Morning Prayer II, The Book of Common Prayer 1979, The Episcopal Church)



Lent 4

“The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people”

NUMBERS 21:4-9 PSALM 107 EPHESIANS 2:1-10 JOHN 3:14-21

The story of the serpents in the wilderness is intriguing. The people of God had been rescued from slavery in Egypt and were making the long circuitous way to the promised land. The initial euphoria of freedom had worn off and they grew impatient. They spoke against God and Moses, trusting more in human sense than God's faithfulness, trusting above all else their construct of reality. This never ends well.

In their panic and pain the people pleaded for deliverance. God rescued Israel, not so much from poisonous serpents, but from Israel's own faithless and poisonous rebellion that had appeared long before the snakes. In that faithlessness, Israel had set itself against God. Israel's rescue was a restored relationship with God, not simply escaping the snakes. The symbol of their salvation was a fiery serpent—a bronze serpent lifted up on a pole. The very image of suffering and death was also the image of life and salvation.

I have read Numbers several times and there is no indication that the serpents ever left. The plague of serpents remained an ongoing threat and the raised bronze serpent an ongoing reminder to turn to God's healing power. This is what intrigues me, the word for fiery serpents is seraphim. Seraphim – the same angels who, with the cherubim, attend God. Could the snake angels be fiery guardian angels who bring us back to the truth that left to our own devices we are helpless and sometimes dangerous?

In the ELCA March 10th is the commemoration of Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Both women devoted their lives to dismantling the sinful human construct of racism. Harriet Tubman was called Moses. She led her people to freedom. Sojourner Truth spoke with a fiery passion that bit deep into the false world order that propped up slavery. They were seraphim. We need seraphim today.

*Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Prayer

Ignite your refining fire, O God. Burn away both the lie of one people's supremacy and the lie that leads another people to doubt their worth. Amen.



Lent 5

“Purge me from my sin”

JEREMIAH 31: 31-34 PSALM 51: 1-12 HEBREWS 5: 5-10 JOHN 12: 20-33

Today we hear of the promise of a new covenant written not on stone but in our hearts. We hear Jesus speaking of being lifted up from the earth, and then buried in it that he might become in truth the first fruit of a redeemed humanity.

While these texts invite us to look ahead to Holy Week and Easter, the Psalm of the day actually calls us back to the very beginning of our Lenten journey. “Create in me a clear heart O God,” cries the Psalmist. “Renew a right spirit within me”. (verse 11) At the heart of his prayer is this petition, “purge me from my sin, and I shall be pure, wash me and I shall be clean indeed.” (verse 8)

Lent is a time for purging all that mars our common humanity and our common home, the earth itself.

One of the worst crimes against humanity is the trafficking of women, men and children for labours in which their dignity and human rights are violated. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.” Seventy years later to the shame of the world there are more than 40 million people who are victims of the sex trade, abusive domestic servitude, organized crime and exploitative forms of labour as migrant workers.

Lent is a time to forge partnerships with other Churches, people of other faith traditions and governments, local and national in purging our world of this crime, “to spot it and to stop it”.

*Archbishop Fred Hiltz
Anglican Church of Canada*

Prayer

Give us faith to face the forces,
who line their pockets from this plague
send us as salvation’s sponsors
willing servants to love

Refrain
God of freedom,
Who leads us into life,
Deliver us from every evil:
And make us deliverers of others.

(Excerpt from The Freedom Prayer for Ending Human Trafficking)

Palm/Passion Sunday

“Hosanna!”

MARK 11:1-11 ISAIAH 50:4-9 PSALM 31, PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 MARK 14:1-15:47

How quickly the crowd gathered around Jesus as he entered Jerusalem and how quickly they dispersed as he was arrested, tried and crucified. People were looking for a powerful figure to challenge the status quo.

As churches and as countries, we need to be aware of the ways in which we use power, even in the name of Jesus. We have a painful history of being colonizers and oppressors. How can we who proclaim Christ as our King resist the temptation to build kingdoms and instead work for justice and freedom for all people?

*National Bishop Susan Johnson
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*

Prayer

Blessed are you, Jesus, for in you we find strength and vulnerability.
As we enter Holy Week, keep us mindful of all who are in need or are vulnerable. May your outpouring of love inspire us, in turn, to acts of deeper love. Amen.



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Triduum

“Until he comes again”

EXODUS 12:1-4, 11-14
JOHN 13:1-17, 31B-35
HEBREWS 10:16-25
PSALM 31:1-4, 15-16

PSALM 116
ISAIAH 52:13-53:12
JOHN 18:1-19:42
1 PETER 4:1-8

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26
PSALM 22
JOB 14:1-14
JOHN 19:38-42

Movements shake things up! One moment, everything feels stable, secure, predictable. Then suddenly the ground shifts, the earth shakes, and what appeared steady and familiar before now feels...different. Movements shake things up. Movements change things.

Paul understood this all too well. He had heard about this new thing from Palestine, this Jesus Movement. He heard how Jesus challenged so many things that were sure and certain, spending more time empowering people than propping up institutions. When the keepers of the status quo arrested Jesus and threatened him with death, he simply stood before them, humble but unbowed. When they killed him, this Jesus just didn't seem to stay dead! And his movement grew, even as Paul tried with all his might to bring it down.

Then a funny thing happened on the way to Damascus. Paul encountered the risen Jesus, and in that moment, the ground beneath him moved. Suddenly the one who had tried to destroy the Jesus Movement now with equal zeal propelled it forward. Indeed, it wasn't long before Paul and his colleagues were described as those who, in the Name of Jesus, “turned the world upside down.”

Throughout his life, Paul remained committed, always calling his friends—and all of us—to join him in that movement where everything we say and everything we do proclaims the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ until he comes again.

*Presiding Bishop Michael Curry
The Episcopal Church*

Prayer

“Let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

(Prayer for the Mission of the Church, from Good Friday, The Book of Common Prayer 1979, The Episcopal Church)



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