

Lent 4 Year B

Notes for Use

This service is designed for you to use in your home. If you used our Advent materials, you will notice a familiar structure and rhythm to these Lent resources. Feel free to use them in any way that suits you best. For example, you can move confession and the kyrie to between the intercessions and the concluding prayers, if you are used to confession just before the Eucharist. You can also cut the number of readings if you prefer, but we would advise if doing this that you retain the Psalm and the Gospel.

The intercessions are offered as a guide only. You are, of course, completely free to use this prayer space as you need or wish to.

The questions at the end of the reflection are optional but offer time for reflection either during the service or afterwards. If you are using this resource to worship either as a family or at an online gathering, you can use them for group discussion. In a group setting you can change the singular "I/my" for "We/our" as needed. Words in **bold** should be said together. Instructions and guidance are written in *italics*.

Lent, a season of penitence and reflection, can sometimes be a challenging season as we focus so much on personal relationship with God. Do remember that you can reach out to your priest, or fellow members of the congregation, or any other trusted person, if you want to discuss how you are feeling as you progress through Lent.

Introduction

You may wish to light a candle or have a moment of silence before you say:

Lord God, I open my ears to hear you.

Lord God, I open my eyes to see you.

Lord God, I open my heart to love you.

-

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; and his mercy endures for ever.

Confession

A time of silent confession may be held here instead.

God our Father, we confess to you and to our fellow members in the Body of Christ that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, and in what we have failed to do. We are truly sorry. Forgive us our sins, and deliver us from the power of evil, for the sake of your Son who died for us, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Kyrie

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy

Collect for Fourth Sunday of Lent

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world, evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

-

Readings

Numbers 21.4-9

4 From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.' ⁶Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.' So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.' ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Psalm 107

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures for ever.

² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,

those he redeemed from trouble
³ and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

¹⁷ Some were sick through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;
¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
¹⁹ Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;
²⁰ he sent out his word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.
²¹ Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.
²² And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

Ephesians 2.1-10

²You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

John 3.14-21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ 'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.'

Reflection

Helplessness is an emotion that many of us find particularly challenging. A total loss of control is difficult to contend with when we are often encouraged by society to see ourselves as free individuals able to make or change our fate. To fall into a state of helplessness then, is our own fault and failing.

Consider the rise in self-help books. You can eat better, parent better, work better, sleep better, socialize better. All you must do is follow the instructions in the book and you will be a better person. If you fail to do as the book tells you to, or do not get the desired results, then the fault lies only with you. Helplessness, in a world of self-help books, is unfashionable at best, and morally reprehensible at worst. Helplessness, in this way of thinking, is a sin.

How very unfashionable then, of our Bible texts today, to remind us that helplessness is a state humanity frequently finds itself in. In fact, Paul argues that since the Fall it is our default state of being. We are incapable, as humans, to cure ourselves of this status. Our sins are too numerous, too deep-seated and too easy to commit for us to heal ourselves of them.

Perhaps there is freedom to be found in the knowledge that we cannot save ourselves. Is there something liberating in knowing that we cannot do anything but fail? Maybe so, but only in a dreadful sort of irony, if we leave the argument there. The knowledge that we are flawed, and incapable of deliverance, when left at that, is a nihilistic philosophy that unfortunately many subscribe to. But it is easy to understand why people might find their condition hopeless. In the world of secular individualism, this nihilism is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the repeated attempts and failures to better ourselves in a meaningful, long-lasting way that gives true satisfaction.

Against this prevailing nihilism, what possible hope is there for us? Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel text for today he told us he came into the world because he loves us and wants to restore us. We were helpless, and we have been given hope. And while secular society might deride hope and faith as wishful thinking, we know that faith in Christ's redeeming love demands a strength of character. To acknowledge our sin is easy, sometimes too easy. But to believe that we are loved, and that all our sins are forgiven, is a leap of faith.

What is then truly freeing is not the knowledge that we cannot do anything to save ourselves, but the knowledge that we have been saved already by the only one who can do so. This is not helplessness, but hope-full-ness. On the cross Christ is lifted up for the world to see, and in the absolute topsy-turviness of God, in that helpless moment there is our only source of hope.

Has there been a time in your life when you have been helpless? How did it feel? Could you talk to God during that time?

Do you find it easier to think about your sins than about your salvation? Talk with God about how you feel and ask for the grace to feel God's presence in that moment.

How can you help others find hope in Christ? Ask God what gifts and talents you have to do this.

Creed

A short silence should be kept before reciting the creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer

The prayer here is a shortened, adapted form of intercession. If your church has shared intercession for the Sunday service beforehand, it can be said here instead. You may also find the intercessions for use during a pandemic suitable here.

I pray to you, Lord, that I may always be full of hope in your love. Hear my prayers:

I pray for the church,

For....

I pray for my community,

For...

I pray for the world,

For...

I pray for those who are ill,

For....

I pray for those who have died,

For....

Hear my prayers Lord, that I may always be full of hope in your love.

Amen.

Meditation



Sit with this image for a few minutes of quiet meditation.

How does it make you feel?

How do you want to respond to God?

Copyright: "Hope", Angela Bisson

Retrieved: saatchiart.com

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass
against us,
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil,
For thine is the kingdom, the power
and the glory
Forever and ever,
Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against
us.
Do not bring us to the time of trial,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the
glory are yours,
Now and forever,
Amen.

-

Conclusion

Lord, all that I have done in your name, accept as my offering today.

Lord, as I remember that you are the source of my hope and love, I ask that I may have your blessing as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.