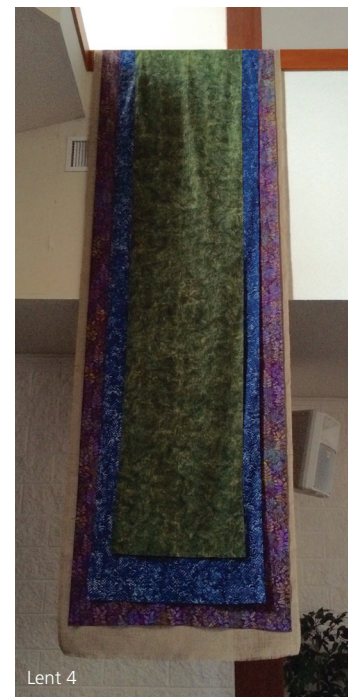
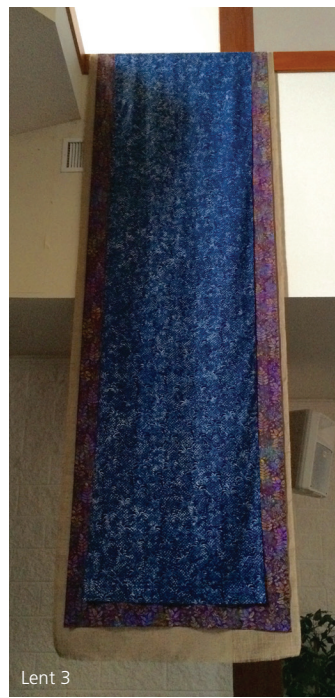
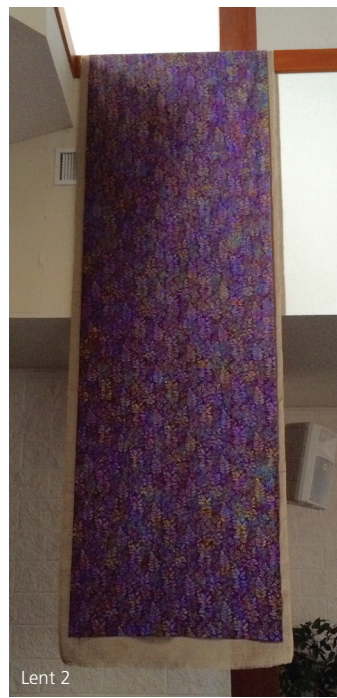




Restore us,
OH GOD

Worship Resources | Lent–Easter 2017



Our world is filled with many voices and distractions that call us away from God—violence and fear, consumerism and materialism, hectic schedules and constant busyness, to name just a few. As Christians, we are not immune to the side effects of living in this environment and can feel afraid, filled both with doubt and an inner restlessness.

So what is an antidote to this perpetual bombardment? Enter the season of Lent. Lent is a 40-day period in the Christian calendar that provides a chance to step back and create space, offering opportunities for reflection. It is a time to repent, to renew our commitment to God's ways, and to empty ourselves of what distracts us from hearing God's voice. Lent is often referred to as a wilderness, a space where the familiar is stripped away and we face our brokenness. Jesus began his ministry alone in the wilderness, where he faced temptation, fasted, and prayed.

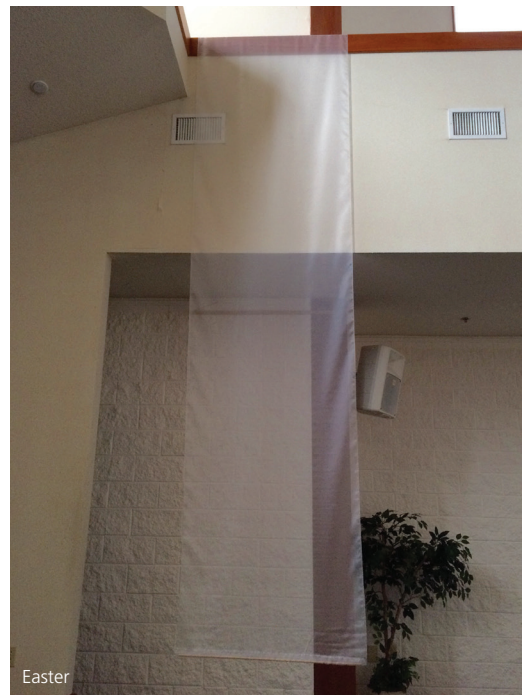
In the three-year lectionary cycle, Year A Scripture texts highlight stories that call us to conversion and new life (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Lazarus). In studying and reflecting on these texts, the writing team noticed the overwhelming call to be restored, often in the midst of the depths of humanity as we experience our thirst, hunger, breath, sight, and temptation but turn to wondering and hoping.

We invite you to enter into this Lenten journey of new life. This is not a journey of perfection, but one where we face both the limits of our humanity and our need for divine transformation. Restore us, O God!

Using this resource

We know every congregation has its own style and ways of worship. We hope that this series can be a starting point—that you can take what is helpful, adapt elements to better suit your needs, and leave the rest. There are key elements from week to week that remain the same, in order to create continuity throughout the season. And—this may seem obvious—but please have musicians, worship leaders, and preachers read the entire season of services *before* beginning the planning. This will give a “big picture” and help everyone get a sense of where the season is headed.

The time of Lent is often a confusing concept to children. We provide an online children's resource that



connects to each weekly focus in concrete and simple language, giving a short lesson on the theme. This resource is a starting point and can be expanded or changed in ways that you find helpful.

Music

There are a variety of suggested songs for each week based on the Scriptures and the theme. These songs come from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*, *Sing the Journey*, and *Sing the Story*, along with other contemporary choices. The theme song “You Are All We Have” (STJ 29) confesses each week that God is the source of our true restoration—our lives are in God’s hands and we have all we need. This song is quite short and should be sung several times in order to fully enter into the text. However, a word of caution—make sure to vary the ways in which the song is used each week, in order to avoid it becoming redundant. Have a soloist share it during offering, speak the words with accompaniment in the background, play an instrumental version, and so forth. (You’ll see an example of this in the service for week 5.)

Visuals

Art is a powerful component of worship that can take our spirits beyond words. The goal in this series is to create a visual of barren wilderness. Make a front table into a rocky landscape using burlap, stones of various shapes and sizes, a candle, and a vase or other glass container. This tablescape remains basically the same each week. The one thing that will change slightly on the table is

the vase. It is absent on the first Sunday. For Lent 2, it is present, but empty. In weeks 3, 4, and 5, the worship leader or pastor adds water to the vase. Week 6 is Palm Sunday, so palm branches can be displayed in the water. On Easter Sunday, the vase will contain a bouquet of colorful flowers.

If you use banners in worship, a visual example, along with instructions, is online. Each week a new color is added, including on Palm Sunday. (If your congregation



This is not a journey of perfection, but one where we face both the limits of our humanity and our need for divine transformation. Restore us, O God!

will be observing Good Friday, consider using a black banner for that service. If a Good Friday service is not typically conducted in your congregation, the visuals can help bridge the gap between the hosannas of Palm Sunday and the alleluias of Easter Sunday. Palm branches and vibrant, colorful banners at the beginning of the Palm Sunday service give way to silence and ritually removing the banners at the end of the service, an indication of what's to come during Holy Week.) A white banner will be in place for Easter Sunday.

Part of each service includes a ritual, during which the congregation can interact with the visual component in some way. When this ritual time occurs changes depending on how it flows within the service.

Scripture readings

The lectionary texts provide four Scriptures each week. You may choose which ones to include in your particular service. When using the gospel text, we highly encourage you to use *The Dramatized New Testament* by Michael Perry (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993) as a resource to make the gospel story come alive.

Confession and words of assurance

As mentioned earlier, confession and repentance is a crucial element in the season of Lent. If your congregation doesn't typically have a time for corporate confession, we encourage you to try it. In keeping with the idea of reflection and space, there is a designated time in each confession for silence. The worship leader can allow a good 10–15 seconds of quiet, allowing the words to settle into minds and hearts.

Holy Week

If your congregation has a Good Friday service, then Palm Sunday (Lent 6) can be a service of hope and joyous anticipation, celebrating Jesus as King. If your church doesn't have Holy Week services, Lent 6 provides options at the end of the service that lead toward the anticipation and sorrow of Good Friday.

Complementary resource for weekday spirituality

“Lenten Guided Prayer” is a 7-week resource prepared annually by the Mennonite Spiritual Directors of Eastern Canada using the *Leader* Lent–Easter theme. Participants practice contemplative prayer to become more aware of the Spirit of God moving in our lives, and may meet in small groups to share. For more information and to order for use in your congregation, search “Lenten Guided Prayer” at www.commonword.ca.



Worship resource writing team (from left to right): Jen Helmuth Shenk, Gwen Gustafson-Zook, Kris Shenk, Janice Yordy Sutter, SaeJin Lee, and Sandi Richard. All photos by Jen Helmuth Shank.

PERMISSION TO PHOTOCOPY

Subscribers to *Leader* are welcome to photocopy worship materials in this section.

DOWNLOAD

Leader subscribers may download the quarterly worship resources at www.leaderonline.org/worship. The username is **Lent17** and the password is **kdf5293**. They are both case sensitive.

Restore us, O God! We hunger.

LENT 1

Scripture

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Focus statement

As humans, we hunger for many things. God, our Provider, knows our deepest longings, offering both sustenance and deliverance from temptation.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 46 I Sing the Mighty Power of God

HWB 360 Break Thou the Bread of Life

HWB 472 I Am the Bread of Life

HWB 474 I Hunger and I Thirst

HWB 475 Become to Us the Living Bread

STJ 86 Taste and See

STS 36 Jesus, Tempted in the Desert

STS 50 Woza Nomthwalo Wakho / Come, Bring Your Burdens to God

“Hungry” by Kathryn Scott

“Your Grace Is Enough” by Chris Tomlin

Call to worship

Leader: In the midst of myriad distractions, we gather, longing for you.

All: Restore us, O God! We hunger.

Leader: In the midst of the temptation to live in fear, we gather, trusting in you.

All: Restore us, O God! We hunger.

Leader: In the midst of the challenges of daily living, we gather, craving your presence.

All: Restore us, O God! We hunger.

Leader: Come, worship the One who feeds our deepest hungers and sustains us with love.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: God of abundance, you give us *all* we need. We confess that, too often, we focus on what we *don't* have. We forget that it is you who truly sustains us. Forgive us. Satisfy us with your steadfast love, and help us to take refuge in remembering that what you provide is good. It is enough.
(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God of abundant grace,

All: restore us.

Leader: Rejoice in the Lord and be glad. Sing praises to the Lord! Taste and see that the Lord *is* good.

Sermon seeds

The wilderness is a place of hunger. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness, and after 40 days of fasting, he is hungry. Yet he rejects the temptation of instant gratification. His focus is on the deeper spiritual hunger that can only be nourished by the Word: encountering and trusting the living God. We see Jesus' reaction to this temptation; not only does it teach us about him, but it also becomes instructive for our own lives and daily struggles. It highlights our greatest temptation: our fear of trusting God.

Often, our focus in the Genesis account is on seeing Eve's sinfulness. Our understanding may be enhanced by realizing that her curiosity and desire to be like God is part of human nature. It too is a kind of hungering.

Think about the many distractions and voices that try to persuade us about what will satisfy. We are tempted to think we can provide for our own needs; that we can satisfy our hungers by taking matters into our own hands. What are our deeper hungers? How can these texts help us pay attention to our deepest hungers and longings? Jesus, hungry in the wilderness, points us to God as the ultimate Provider. This is the deep truth that Jesus learns and lives. He invites us to do the same. We can be restored and nourished by God's deep love.

Lenten ritual

In remembering that God satisfies our deepest hunger, you are invited to prepare and share communion.

Benediction

Assured that God who loves you will sustain you, go from this place freed to love, freed to trust, freed to serve. Amen.

Restore us, O God! We wonder.

LENT 2

Scripture

Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9

Focus statement

In our humanness, we want to know, to define, and to have concrete answers for everything. However, life is filled with uncertainty. We trust that God, the great Mystery, is always present with us in our wondering.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 62 Who Is So Great a God

HWB 70 Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise

HWB 77 God of Many Names

HWB 338 I Know Not Why

HWB 594 Lord, You Sometimes Speak in Wonders

STJ 18 Over My Head

STS 34 You Are Holy / Eres santo

STS 45 Calm Me, Lord

STS 51 Quién dicen que soy yo? / Who Do You Say That I Am?

“God of Wonders” by Chris Tomlin

“Indescribable” by Chris Tomlin

“Revelation Song” by Kari Jobe

Call to worship

Leader: Mindful that God, the great Mystery, has called us,

All: *we gather to worship.*

Leader: Curious about God’s ways in the world.

All: *we gather to worship.*

Leader: Wondering in the face of uncertainty,

All: *we gather to worship.*

Leader: Receive our worship and our wonderings, O God, as we seek after you.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: God of mystery, you call us into the unknown. But we do not always follow willingly.

Reader 1: We confess that we do not want to leave behind what is familiar. We prefer looking like those around us.

Reader 2: We do not want to change our well-refined beliefs. We prefer to think and believe in the same ways we always have.

Reader 3: We do not want to give up the comfort of our own self-sufficiency. We prefer to stay in control.

Leader: Forgive us, O Lord, when in our best effort to work *for* you, we fail to move *with* your Spirit.

All: *Stir us deep within. Recover a sense of your holy wonder and make room within us for the mystery of your Spirit.*

(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God of mystery,

All: *restore us.*

Leader: Our help comes from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth. The Lord will keep you from all harm. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Amen.

Sermon seeds

A deep conversation in the dark of night seems to be fertile ground for questions of faith. Nicodemus's faith appears to be rooted in signs and proofs, yet he is not totally comprehending, and seeks more from Jesus. Faith, according to Jesus, has less to do with proofs, signs, claims, and human achievement, and more to do with God's love poured out for the world.

Abram says very little in the pivotal story from Genesis about God's call to him. There is so much he doesn't know about his future! He takes the first step and simply goes, as the Lord has told him.

Our desire for certainty can be great. We want to know, prove, and figure it out. Even as we want to be in control, we know we aren't. We live with uncertainty and anxiety. We seem to be living in an increasingly anxious time of information overload. How does God meet us here, in our anxiety?

Jesus invites Nicodemus into a conversation of wondering and mystery that travels away from predictable and logically clear paths. In the life of faith, we need the tools of wonder and curiosity. Jesus speaks to us as he helps Nicodemus explore faith not as calculated and proven, but as a gift of life given by God. God, who is great Mystery to us, engages our doubts, wonderings, and questions. But even more, as the psalmist recounts in Psalm 121, God meets us in our anxiety, assuring us that we are loved and held in God's all-embracing care.

Lenten ritual

Invite people to come the front altar table and take a stone from the rocky landscape. You may choose to say: "God is the rock of our salvation. God moves and wills through all our wondering and wandering."

Benediction

Full of wonder, full of curiosity, full of inquisitiveness, go trusting that God, the great Mystery, goes with you always. Amen.

Restore us, O God! We thirst.

LENT 3

Scripture

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

Focus statement

Our bodies know the desperate need for water: we cannot survive without it. Likewise, our deepest selves are parched and yearn to be drenched in God's love. God, who is Love, quenches our thirst so that we can live into the fullness of life.

Lenten ritual (part A)

Fill the vase on the worship table with water as the call to worship is read. You may choose to fill the entire vase this week, or add to it for the next three subsequent Sundays (Lent 3, 4, and 5). Following the sermon, invite the congregation to come forward and receive a drink of water (prepare water cups ahead of time).

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 12 Come, Let Us All Unite to Sing

HWB 372 O Healing River

HWB 474 I Hunger and I Thirst

HWB 495 O Let All Who Thirst

HWB 514 Lord, I Am Fondly, Earnestly Longing

HWB 598 A Wonderful Savior Is Jesus

STJ 44 The Love of God

STJ 49 Rain Down

STS 64 There Is a Well / Un pozo hay

“All Who Are Thirsty” by Brenton Brown and Glenn Robertson

“As the Deer” by Martin J. Nystrom

“One Thing Remains” by Brian Johnson, Christa Black, and Jeremy Riddle

Call to worship

Leader: In a dry and weary land,

All: restore us, O God.

Leader: Parched and depleted,

All: restore us, O God.

Leader: Longing for your living water,

All: restore us, O God.

Leader: We thirst. Receive our worship as a sign of our yearning for you.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: O God, *you* are the living Water. You restore us to life.
We confess that in the desert moments of our lives we forget your faithfulness.
Our bodies grow tired; our hearts dry up.
Our minds become clouded and we do not remember that you are our deliverer.

People: **When we see the dryness behind and before us,
we quarrel among ourselves and burden one another.
We cry out: “Is the Lord even among us?”**

Leader: Forgive us, O Lord,
for in the harshness of life’s desert journey
we quickly focus on ourselves.
We forget that you have been,
you are,
and you will forever be our deliverer.

People: **Restore in us a remembering spirit,
that we may hope in you again.
Renew our hearts, O Lord.
Make us generous in our praise,
that we may worship you anew!**
(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God, our living Water,

All: *restore us.*

Leader: Let all who thirst, come. Come and drink from the living Water. Let all who have nothing, come to the Lord. Come—without money or price. Come and draw freely from the well of our Lord, which will never run dry.

Sermon seeds

Thirst and water: human need and God’s provisions. The invitation of the Lenten season is to recognize our deep personal and communal needs, and God’s power to restore us. All the texts for this Sunday speak to these themes.

Rather than simply read the story, *inhabit* the thirst of the community camping in the desert, unsure of their next source of water. In their time of desperate thirst and vulnerability, it is hard to believe that God is with them. But in the familiar pattern, God patiently gives them what they need. More than that, God is keeping the promise to sustain and care for them. This is a story of grace.

Likewise, *dwell* in the thirst of the Samaritan woman. What insecurities parch her? What does she have to protect? How have her life and energies been compromised? What happens to her defenses at Jesus’ request for a drink and his willingness to talk with her? As he breaks the cultural rules, the way is broken open for God’s way of love that excludes no one. Her hope grows, and this conversation becomes like a drenching rain for her parched soul. So satisfying is this interaction that she tells everyone she knows, and they come to meet Jesus for themselves.

Where is your thirst leading this Lent? What is your community thirsting for? Depleted, withered cells and souls cry for water. God hears our deepest cries. God’s quenching Love brings us life.

Lenten ritual (part B): Come and drink

As the people come forward, offer these words: “Come and drink from this free living Water. God quenches all our thirsts.”

Benediction

Revived by God’s thirst-quenching love, go from this place to live the good news of Love in the world.

Restore us, O God! We see.

LENT 4

Scripture

1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

Focus statement

We are bombarded by visual images, and can mistake what is seen for what is true. God reveals hidden truths, surprising us and challenging our assumptions. Once our eyes and hearts are opened, we can see with greater clarity.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 166 I'll Praise My Maker

HWB 359 Lead Us, O Father

HWB 369 Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

HWB 517 Open My Eyes That I May See

HWB 545 Be Thou My Vision

STS 5 Open My Ears, Open My Eyes

STS 39 Will You Come and Follow Me

STS 65 Abre mis ojos / Open My Eyes

STS 68 Kyrie

STS 115 Beauty for Brokenness

"Open the Eyes of My Heart" by Paul Baloche

"Our God" by Chris Tomlin

"I Want to Know You" by Sonic Flood

Call to worship

Leader: Here in this place we gather to worship.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Here in this place we gather to see you.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Here in this place we gather to perceive you in all your glory and beauty.

All: *Open our eyes and our hearts.*

Leader: Remove our blindness so that we might see ourselves honestly, and humbly worship you.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: O God, you open our eyes to see what is true. We confess that sometimes it is easier for us to stay blind than to embrace the fullness of your truth.

People: **We admit that it is scary and unsettling to fully accept what you want us to see.**

Leader: Your truth exposes our hidden secrets, upsets our expectations, and establishes a new order where we are no longer leading the way. Forgive us, O Lord, when we would rather stay in the darkness of our current reality instead of receiving your miracle of light and new life.

People: **Remove the cataracts from our eyes, that we may see and celebrate your goodness around us. Quicken our minds, and soften our hearts, that we may recognize that you are at work.**

(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God who brings all things into the light,

All: *restore us.*

Leader: The Lord is our shepherd, we shall not want. Though we cannot see through the valley of the shadow of death, God is with us. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Sermon seeds

Samuel goes to anoint the next king, expecting that one of the older, stronger sons will be anointed. He is blind to the Lord's choice: the youngest and smallest son of the smallest clan of the smallest tribe of Israel will be king. "People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV). David is hiding in plain view.

The story of the man born blind is a drama (comedy?) in six acts. The healing of the man from blindness to sight stands in stark contrast to the spiritual blindness of the sighted Pharisees. Jesus clearly finds it easier to heal the man born blind than to heal the blurry vision of the Pharisees, who expect that their way of seeing is the "correct" way. "The Lord looks at the heart."

In our Lenten frame of mind, do we have the strength and honesty to notice our own blindness, to look deeply for God's hidden truths right in front of us? We think we see clearly, but the great Revealer challenges our assumptions, turning old ways of thinking upside down, empowering those who have been powerless. Jesus is willing not only to restore our sight, but also to make a whole new creation in us. This kind of seeing and living has consequences for us and for the church.

Lenten ritual

Conduct an anointing ceremony as an invitation to receive God's anointing and healing. While people are coming forward, the congregation can sing "Take, O Take Me as I Am" (*STJ* 81) and other songs (from the suggested list or elsewhere).

Benediction

Go with your eyes wide open and your hearts softened to see the face of God in each person you meet—and to love them accordingly. Go in God's peace. Amen.

Restore us, O God! We breathe.

LENT 5

Scripture

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

Focus statement

When we come to the end of our own human strength, vitality, and purpose, we recognize the reality of death in and around us. God, who is Spirit, breathes life into us, revealing God's glory and purpose. We, and the community, are restored.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have (*use with ritual later in the service*)

HWB 26 Holy Spirit, Come with Power

HWB 336 When Peace, like a River

HWB 349 Spirit of the Living God

HWB 356 Breathe on Me, Breath of God

HWB 483 O God, Who Gives Us Life

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

STJ 35 O Breath of Life

STJ 46 O Breathe on Me, O Breath of God

STS 49 I Will Come to You in the Silence

STS 106 Comme un souffle fragile / Like a Tender Breath, Stirring

STS 121 Nothing Is Lost on the Breath of God

"Breathe" by Michael W. Smith

"Days of Elijah" by Robin Mark

"Everlasting God" by Chris Tomlin

Call to worship

Leader: Come. Bring your weary bones and your crushed souls.

All: *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your dashed hopes and broken dreams.

All: *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Come. Bring your heavy sorrow and lingering sadness.

All: *Now is the time to worship the life-giving Spirit.*

Leader: Bring all you that you have and all that you are.

The Spirit is here to breathe life into all that is lifeless.

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Lenten ritual

Lead the congregation in a body/centering/breathing prayer. You may move your hands in accordance with the words of the theme song ("You Are All We Have" *STJ 29*). A small group of musicians can play or sing the song while the rest of the congregation joins in the breathing and movement.

Confession and words of assurance

Leader: God, we confess that when we look into the valleys of our lives,
we are tempted to fix our gaze on the remnants of our past.
We see the dry bones, and we doubt in our minds—“Will these bones ever live?”

People: **But in the midst of our doubt,
we proclaim that you are the life-giving Spirit.
You breathe new life into all that is dead.**

Reader 1: For you, O God, raised up the dry bones in the valley.

Reader 2: Your Son, Jesus, brought Lazarus out from the tomb,

Reader 3: and your Spirit lifted anew the hearts of the disciples.

Leader: Teach us, O Lord, to wait for your breath.

All: ***Blow your mighty wind into the hollow chambers of our hearts,
that we may never settle for death
but rise again as your beloved people.***
(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God, holy Breath,

All: ***restore us.***

Leader: But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you, once more. Our whole selves waited for you, O Lord, and you answered us. In you there is unfailing love and full redemption. You redeem us from all our sins. Amen.

Sermon seeds

In this fifth week of our Lenten journey, we may be feeling that the way is serious and heavy. If we allow them to, the Scripture stories this week offer levity and joy.

The story from Ezekiel fires our imagination. Imagine the power and joy of this enlivening Spirit that breathes life into a valley of hopeless, old, dead bones. There is something fun, surprising, and energizing about this image. God's Spirit is able to bring life out of the most hopeless terrain. The Spirit's work is joyful, astounding, wonderful! How often are we stuck in dust and deadness, unable to see what the Spirit wants to do? How might the Spirit be ready to bring our dead communities back to life?

The story of Lazarus's death is one of human drama with plenty of grief and tears. Even Jesus cries and is deeply moved at the death of Lazarus and the grieving of his friends. Still, this story ends in glory and joy. Lazarus is raised from the dead. His community is urged to take off the graveclothes, thereby freeing Lazarus into his new life. Hope abounds! Grief is turned to joy. The community is offered the opportunity to come to life and to be restored.

What kind of imagination and trust will it take for us to name the bleak valleys where we are dead, and wait with anticipation for the Spirit of God to breathe us into life? These stories celebrate God's redemptive action in the midst of our lifelessness. What is dead can spring forth into new life.

Benediction

Go, breathing deeply of the Spirit who inspires life into all that is lifeless. Go enlivened, invigorated, refreshed. Amen.

Restore us, O God! We hope.

LENT 6 (PALM SUNDAY)

Scripture

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14-27, 66 or Matthew 21:1-11

Focus statement

Our human society values status, power, wealth, and success. God turns things upside down by becoming one of us, taking the role of a humble servant. In hope, we shout praise that God can deliver us, even while we ask, “Who is this?”

Lenten ritual

On this Sunday, focus on moving the overall atmosphere of the service from the initial joy of Palm Sunday to the somberness of Good Friday that is to come. You may have the children begin the service by waving palm branches. You can also place palm branches in the vase on the table. Regarding the banners, you may remove the colorful strips of fabric (the “banner”) at different points throughout the service. For a more dramatic effect, simply drop the individual fabric at the foot of the banner stand, or remove it completely all at once after the closing benediction. Whatever method is used, by the end of the service, only the bare structure of the banner frame should remain. Ask the congregation to leave in silence.

Song suggestions:

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 69 The Lord Is King

HWB 100 Praise Him, Praise Him

HWB 106 All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name

HWB 237 All Glory, Laud, and Honor

HWB 238 Hosanna, Loud Hosanna

HWB 239 Ride On, Ride On in Majesty

HWB 371 Let There Be Light

STS 73 Jesus Is Coming (Pave the Way with Branches)

STS 75 Heri ni jina /Blessed Be the Name

“Build Your Kingdom Here” by Rend Collective Experiment

“In Christ Alone” by Keith Getty

“Hosanna” by Hillsong United

Call to worship

Leader: Who is this who comes, humble and riding on a donkey?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Who is this who comes, free from pride and hubris?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Who is this who comes, celebrated by powerless children?

All: Hosanna! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!

Leader: Hosanna! Come join in the celebration of hope!

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession and words of assurance

(adapted from “K.2.2 Prayers of Confession, 6” in The Worship Sourcebook. [Grand Rapids: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, 2004], 587.)

Leader: Jesus, our Lord, you came to us humbly—riding on a donkey.
In peace, you showed us the way of your kingdom.
We confess that our vision of the kingdom is not pure.
It is stained with our own selfish desires.

**People: We shout hosannas to praise you,
—only out of our need to survive.
We lay down our cloaks and palms to adore you
—only to strip your garment away and humiliate you.**

Leader: Forgive us, O Lord, when our mouths that seek to praise you often deny and defy you.

**People: Renew in us an obedient spirit,
that we may fully accept and follow your will.**

(Pause for silent confession)

Leader: God, our true Hope,

All: restore us.

Leader: Our times are in your hands, O God. Let your face shine upon your servants who pursue your will, and save us in your unfailing love.

Sermon seeds

It can be difficult to know what is needed in a Palm Sunday sermon. Certainly the Scripture passages cover much territory. As the preacher, you will need to discern what kind of emphasis is needed. If your congregation dwells in the Passion Week story with a Maundy Thursday or Good Friday service, you may want to focus on the triumphal entry account in Matthew 21, exploring Jesus’ way of turning upside down the expectations of a king entering the holy city. Or you may discern that the congregation needs to be led into the Good Friday story in order to prepare them for celebrating the risen Christ on Easter.

The servant’s song from Philippians 2 speaks to both approaches. Both the triumphal entry and the crucifixion accounts provoke us to see Jesus as the humble servant who does not “consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (Philippians 2:6 NIV). He chooses to be obedient to death, and God exalts him to the highest place. In his ministry, Jesus has offered life and liberation to all. His death is an attempt to silence his work and his followers. (Soon, we will celebrate that his crucifixion was unable to destroy Jesus or his message. The powers of destruction cannot destroy the power of God’s love and purposes.)

Benediction

Option 1 (with focus leading toward Good Friday): May the One who lives, suffers, and dies, not considering equality with God something to be exploited, walk with you, giving you hope even in the midst of sorrow. *(Then, strike the stage/banners.)*

Option 2 (with focus on hope and Palm Sunday): Live in hopeful attention to the One who comes to deliver us. Live in hope. Live in love. *(Then, strike the stage/banners.)*

Restore us, O God! We live.

EASTER

Scripture

Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28:1-10

Focus statement

When our hopes for what will bring life are shattered, we come to the tomb feeling lost, confused, disillusioned, and afraid. But it is precisely there that God meets us—revealed in the mystery of the risen Christ. God, the Author of life, empowers us to live fully and enables us to praise once again. We dance, we sing, we proclaim: Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Lenten ritual (part A)

It's a party! Fill the vase on the altar table with fresh flowers. Following the sermon, celebrate communion together as a joy-filled response to the resurrection.

Song suggestions

THEME SONG:

STJ 29 You Are All We Have

HWB 118 Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

HWB 267 Christ Has Arisen

HWB 269 Thine is the Glory

HWB 273 Low in the Grave He Lay

HWB 275 Lift Your Glad Voices

HWB 280 Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

HWB 283 Christ Who Left His Home in Glory

HWB 285 All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name

STS 89 Christ Is Alive (and Goes Before Us)

STS 90 Oh, qué bueno es Jesús / Oh How Good Is Christ the Lord

STS 95 Jesus Has Done So Much for Me

“The River Is Here” by Andy Park

“The Wonderful Cross” by Chris Tomlin

Call to worship

Leader: When all hope seems lost, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: When fear hovers close at hand, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: When disillusionment and despair threaten us, Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

Leader: Come! Celebrate the risen Lord! Alleluia!

Offering prayer

With all that we have and all that we are, we honor you. Restore us, O God, to live in freedom and trust.

Confession of faith (based on STS 179)

Leader: O living God, who raised Jesus from the dead
we shout your great victory;
we sing hymns of praise!

**People: Even when our hearts are heavy
and our eyes are dimmed by sorrow,
you are faithful.
You wipe away all tears
and bring joy in the morning.**

Leader: Teach us, O God, to trust your gracious love,
to rest in your unfailing goodness,
to hope in your true promise,
that we may rejoice all our days
and share the good news:

**All: Alleluia! Amen!
Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!**

Sermon seeds

Easter morning begins in the grief of the tomb. In the very places of utter brokenness, God meets us in the risen Christ. It is in our times of deepest need, knowing that we cannot help ourselves, that God brings life and love that cannot be destroyed. All the Lenten glimpses of God's restoring power swell to full strength. Death is conquered! Sin is forgiven! Peace abounds! Love flows! We are alive!

Matthew's telling of Easter morning involves all creation! The earth itself quakes with the news that Christ is risen. This is a celebration of cosmic proportions. We scarcely can take it in! We contemplate this most astonishing news: resurrection. It shatters all our normal ways of thinking and invites a new way of living, beyond what we always thought possible. Now, by God's grace, and with God's limitless resources, we can dream farther, live abundantly, and love expansively.

One option for worship planning: Deliver the sermon in the first half of the Easter service, beginning with the grief of the tomb, and our deepest needs, being transformed by God's gift of resurrection life. Then, the second half of the service can be the congregation's response with many expressions of celebration and joy: singing, dancing, playing instruments, and praying with joy and thanksgiving. May this be a day permeated with genuine joy.

Lenten ritual (part B): Communion

If possible, you may want to have a more elaborate love feast/celebration with bowls of fresh fruit, chocolate, sweet rolls, and so forth. Play praise music or invite the congregation to sing together as they come forward to partake in the celebration.

Benediction

May the same power of love that raised Jesus from the dead fill you with *life*, empowering you to live fully, to love freely, and to praise God with your whole being. Praise be to God! Amen.