



# A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

*OF JUSTICE,  
LIBERATION, AND  
FLOURISHING*

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# ASH WEDNESDAY

Reading:

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

“For where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be also.”

## **Opening Reflection**

Lent draws us into a holy tension between humility and public faithfulness. Jesus teaches us to avoid performative righteousness—acts done to be seen, celebrated, or rewarded. Yet Jesus never tells his disciples to be silent in the face of injustice or to hide the work of liberation. Instead, this teaching sharpens the question: ***Who is the audience of our faithfulness—earthly powers, or the God who liberates?***

Today, as LGBTQIA+ people, Black and Brown communities, immigrants, disabled people, Muslims and Jews, trans youth, women, and many others face targeted legislative assault and social harm, Lent invites us to examine where our treasure, energy, and allegiance really dwell. Is it in the comfort of the status quo?

Or in the costly work of building a world where all can flourish?

We witness policies that criminalize care, diminish dignity, and deny belonging. These are not abstract issues—they alter real lives, families, futures, and communities of faith.

Lent does not ask us to accept this suffering as inevitable. Rather, Lent sharpens our moral attention:

***What systems demand our silence?***

***Who benefits from that silence?***

***And who does it harm?***

## **Lent invites communities to:**

- protect trans youth
- speak against racist legislation
- counter Christian nationalism
- defend reproductive autonomy
- shelter those fleeing violence
- resist book bans and censorship
- support immigrant families
- advocate for housing and economic justice

This is not extra to the gospel—it is the gospel.

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. Who is currently being harmed by state or national policies in my community?
2. What treasures of empire have I been taught to value?
3. What treasures of God's reign do I long for?
4. What would costly solidarity look like for me or my congregation?
5. What am I willing to fast from so that others might flourish?
6. Where might God be calling us to put our treasure—our time, our voice, our resources?

## **Prayer**

God of mercy and liberation, turn our hearts from the treasures of empire toward the treasures of your beloved community. Where there is harm, make us advocates. Where there is oppression, make us resistors. Where there is silence, give us courage to speak. Where there is despair, teach us to build hope. Align our lives not with the powers that destroy, but with your vision of justice, dignity, and joy so that all your people may flourish. Amen.

*May this Lent move us away from performative righteousness,  
away from silent complicity, and toward a public faithfulness  
that treasures the liberation of all God's children.  
Where our treasure is, may our hearts be also.*

# FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Reading:

Matthew 4:1–11

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness... and afterward he was famished.”

## Opening Reflection

Before Jesus heals the sick, feeds the hungry, or proclaims liberation, he is driven into the wilderness to confront temptation.

This temptation is not trivial. It is not about dessert or small personal vices.

Jesus is tested at the level of **survival, identity, and allegiance** — the very pressures that shape our political, economic, and spiritual lives today.

Each temptation corresponds to a form of state power— power still used today to discipline, punish, or control marginalized communities.

## Turning Stones to Bread → Economic Control

The first temptation targets hunger — one of the oldest tools of empire.

Today, governments still manipulate survival through:

- food & housing insecurity
- poverty wages
- denial of healthcare
- bans on gender-affirming care
- restrictions on reproductive healthcare
- denial of disability benefits

Those in power often ask:

**“Why don’t they just comply?”**

But Jesus teaches that survival must never come at the expense of dignity. We do not exist merely to feed the economic systems that claim authority over us.

Oppressed communities are too often asked to justify their right to exist, to marry, to transition, to worship freely, or to live without harassment. Jesus refuses to perform worthiness to gain legitimacy. Belovedness never needs to be proven.

## **Lent as Wilderness Discipleship**

The wilderness teaches the church three things:

**Solidarity** — We do not abandon those under attack.

**Clarity** — We do not confuse empire for God.

**Resistance** — We refuse the bargains that harm our neighbor.

This is the discipleship Lent demands.

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. What temptations do I see the church facing today?
2. Who is being asked to prove their worthiness in our society?
3. What systems weaponize economic survival?
4. Where do I see faith communities trading justice for political influence?
5. What allegiances do I need to release in order to follow Jesus more freely?
6. How is God calling us into solidarity with those harmed by current legislation?

## **Prayer**

Christ who meets us in the wilderness, Give us courage to reject the bargains of empire. Strengthen those whose survival is threatened by unjust laws. Guard the vulnerable from those who weaponize religion. Root out the temptations that lead us to silence, neutrality, or complicity. May your church choose solidarity over safety, liberation over comfort, and beloved community over domination. Amen.

*Beloved of God, may the wilderness clarify your calling, sharpen your resistance, and anchor you in the fierce love that refuses to bow to oppression. May we follow Jesus not into influence, but into liberation.*

# SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Reading:

John 3:1-17

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the reign of God without being born from above.”

## Opening Reflection

Nicodemus arrives at night—curious, cautious, and caught between the world he knows and the world Jesus is unveiling.

Jesus invites him into rebirth, not as a private spiritual metaphor, but as a radical reorientation of allegiance, imagination, and identity. To be “born from above” is to see that:

- nothing oppressive is inevitable
- nothing excluded must remain excluded and
- nothing harmed must remain harmed

It is to believe that a different world is not only possible, but already breaking in.

Nicodemus comes from the world of religious and political respectability. He risks his position simply by asking questions.

Today, many find themselves in his shoes:

- clergy afraid to speak against anti-trans legislation
- teachers scared to challenge book bans
- medical providers pressured to deny care
- congregations hesitant about public solidarity
- families navigating hostile policies quietly to survive

Sometimes caution is necessary for safety.

## But Jesus invites Nicodemus beyond survival into transformation.

Rebirth is Pentecostal in the deepest sense—**new breath, new vision, new courage.**

## When Faith Requires Imagination

Nicodemus says: “How can these things be?”

It’s a question that echoes today in the face of violent policies:

- How can trans youth flourish in states that ban their care?
- How can families thrive when healthcare is criminalized?
- How can immigrants remain whole in a system built on borders and detention?
- How can Black life flourish under policing and prisons?
- How can disabled communities survive under austerity?
- How can democracy function under voter suppression?

Rebirth requires imagining what does not yet exist—and insisting it should. This is the work of Lent: To push the church from scarcity to abundance, from compliance to resistance, from neutrality to solidarity.

## Journaling & Reflection Questions

1. Where am I still approaching Jesus “by night”—holding curiosity but protecting my safety?
2. What spaces in my life need rebirth, not minor reform?
3. Who is being condemned by current laws, and what would flourishing look like for them?
4. What communities are modeling rebirth and liberation that I can learn from?
5. What must die in the church so new life can be born?
6. How is the Spirit expanding my imagination for justice?

## Prayer

God of rebirth and revolution, breathe new life into our weary imagination. When fear drives us into the night, call us into courage, solidarity, and public witness. Save us from condemnation—not only the condemnation imposed upon us, but the condemnation we impose on others. May your church be born again into liberation, flourishing, and justice for all your beloved. Amen.

*Beloved, may you be born again into a world where trans kids grow old, where migration is met with welcome, where bodies are honored, where families are protected, and where belovedness is never up for debate. For God so loved the world—all of it, without condition.*

# THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Reading:

John 4:5-42

"The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

## Opening Reflection

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well in the heat of the day—outside the rhythms of her community, outside the boundaries of religious legitimacy, and outside the assumptions of who belongs. Their encounter dismantles:

- ethnic boundaries
- gendered expectations
- religious hostility
- moral policing
- and geographic divisions of holiness

This is not a casual conversation—it is a confrontation with systems that exclude.

She belongs to a people historically despised by dominant religious authorities. Her gender limits her social standing. Her marital history invites moral scrutiny—scrutiny that Jesus refuses to reinforce. She embodies all the reasons a community might withhold belonging.

In our time she might be:

- a trans teen turned away from care
- a queer immigrant seeking asylum
- a Black mother navigating policing
- a Muslim woman surveilled for her faith
- a disabled person denied accommodations,
- or an LGBTQIA+ person quietly pushed out of church life

She is met not with suspicion, but dignity.

Liberation is not simply for the oppressed—it flows through the oppressed.

This reverses the pattern of respectability politics in the church. Authority does not trickle down from the powerful; it springs up from those denied legitimacy.

## **From Hostility to Hospitality**

Jews and Samaritans do not share things in common.

Jesus breaks open that history without flattening their difference.

Reconciliation does not require sameness—  
only mutual dignity and shared flourishing.

In our time, that means:

- queer and trans flourishing does not require assimilation
- immigrant flourishing does not require erasing culture
- disabled flourishing does not require fixing bodies
- BIPOC flourishing does not require white comfort
- youth flourishing does not require silence
- and reproductive flourishing does not require moral policing

Hospitality is not pity—it is the transformation of community.

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. Who in our community is expected to fetch water alone?
2. Who does the church still treat as morally suspect or socially deviant?
3. What wells (resources) are restricted or policed? Who controls them?
4. Where do we see “living water” already flowing—movements, communities, or individuals?
5. How is God inviting our faith community into reparative hospitality?
6. Who is the Spirit raising up as theologians, evangelists, and leaders from the margins?

## **Prayer**

God of living water, Meet us at the wells of exclusion, where communities thirst for dignity and safety. Break open the boundaries we construct, dismantle the hostility we inherit, and interrupt every system that withholds belonging. May living water flow toward justice, toward mutuality, and toward the flourishing of all your beloved. Amen.

*Beloved, may you drink deeply of the living water that refuses scarcity and insists on flourishing. May your witness unsettle systems of exclusion and expand the boundaries of who belongs. For the Spirit is already at work, raising up evangelists from the margins and restoring communities through love.*

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Reading:

John 9:1-41

"Jesus said, 'As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"

## **Opening Reflection**

This story begins with a question rooted in blame:

### **"Who sinned?"**

The disciples see a man who is blind, and their first instinct is to assign guilt, fault, or moral failure. This is not a question—it is an accusation shaped by a system where disability is moralized, weaponized, and policed.

We still live in such a world. Governments, churches, and institutions continue to frame disability, poverty, identity, and trauma as personal failings rather than the result of unjust systems.

The disciples' assumption is familiar:

- If someone is struggling, they must have caused it.
- If someone is different, they must be broken.
- If someone needs care, they must be a burden.

Jesus rejects all of it.

Jesus refuses to participate in the system that ties suffering to sin, disability to punishment, or embodiment to moral worth. He redirects the question entirely: *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned."*

This is a gospel of **dignity without condition**. Of **worth without justification**. Of **belonging without moral test**.

In a world where disability rights are under attack—where healthcare is denied, benefits are cut, and autonomy is legislated—this text speaks directly into our moment.

The religious leaders cannot accept the healing not because it is miraculous, but because it disrupts the systems they rely on to sort, exclude, and control. Systems of domination demand proof of worthiness. Jesus demands none.

## For Our Time: Seeing the Harm Clearly

We live in a moment where governments and systems intentionally obscure harm:

- denying the realities of anti-trans laws
- hiding the violence of policing and prisons
- masking the harm of poverty wages
- erasing disabled voices from policy making
- banning books to control narratives
- sanitizing Christian nationalism as “faith,”
- minimizing the danger faced by Jewish, Muslim, and immigrant communities

The Gospel calls the church to refuse this blindness and to see clearly the suffering—and resilience—of marginalized communities.

## Journaling & Reflection Questions

1. Where am I still influenced by narratives that tie worth to productivity, ability, or conformity?
2. How have I witnessed systems assigning blame rather than addressing harm?
3. Who are the truth-tellers in my community? How am I supporting them?
4. What forms of structural blindness exist in my faith community?
5. In what ways is Jesus inviting us to see with new clarity and courage?
6. How are disabled, queer, trans, and marginalized people revealing God's work among us?

## Prayer

God of sight and liberation, Open our eyes to the structures that harm your beloved. Expose systems that blame instead of heal, that interrogate instead of welcome, that punish instead of restore. Bless those who speak truth at great cost. Bless those denied care, dignity, or autonomy. Bless those burdened by systems that refuse to see them fully. Give us courage to resist, clarity to see, and commitment to create a world where all can flourish. Amen.

*Beloved, May your eyes be opened to the truth that heals rather than harms, liberates rather than confines, restores rather than excludes. May you see clearly the beauty of every body, the dignity of every identity, and the holiness of every story. And may this sight lead you into the work of justice, resistance, and flourishing.*

# FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Reading:

John 11:1-45

“Jesus began to weep.”

“Unbind him and let him go.”

## **Opening Reflection**

The raising of Lazarus is not merely a miracle story—it is a confrontation with the systems that deal in death.

Mary and Martha stand in grief not only over their brother's death, but over the lateness of Jesus' arrival. Their lament is honest, unfiltered, and theological:

**“Jesus, if you had been here...”**

Even within the church, people lament:

- the church's silence
- the church's compliance
- the church's slow repentance
- the church's fear of conflict
- the church's alignment with empire

Jesus does not dismiss their grief. Jesus joins it.

Divinity is revealed through tears before it is revealed through resurrection.

Lazarus is called out of a tomb—not into secrecy, but into public life.

This challenges every narrative that tells marginalized people to:

- stay quiet
- stay private
- stay small
- stay in the shadows
- stay in the closet
- stay out of public space
- “not make it political”

**Resurrection is public.**  
**Liberation is public.**  
**Flourishing is public.**

The Gospel does not call people into invisibility—it calls them into life.

Lazarus emerges still bound in burial cloth.

**Jesus does not unbind him.**  
**The community does. This is crucial.**

Jesus raises, but the community frees.

## **And the Crowd Said, “See How He Loved Him”**

Love is not sentiment—it is risk.

- It is public enough to be noticed.
- It is political enough to threaten power.
- It is embodied enough to smell like tears and death and hope.

Love that does not disturb systems is not the love Jesus practiced.

### **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. What tombs of despair, exclusion, or harm do we see in our communities?
2. Who is waiting for someone to call them into public life and dignity?
3. What burial cloths (policies, narratives, structures) keep people bound?
4. Where is our faith community being called to do the work of unbinding?
5. What griefs does the church need to stop suppressing and start honoring?
6. How might resurrection look like collective flourishing instead of private belief?

### **Prayer**

God of tear-stained resurrection, Call us out of the tombs that confine us, and into the public life of dignity and joy. Teach us to weep without shame, to lament without numbness, and to love without caution. Strengthen us for the work of unbinding—until every policy, system, and practice is transformed for the flourishing of your beloved. Amen.

*Beloved, May you rise from every tomb that empire has prepared for you, and may your community unbind you from every cloth that restricts your life. For resurrection is not merely survival—it is the fullness of public, joyful, embodied flourishing.*

# PALM SUNDAY

Reading:

Matthew 21:1–11

“Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.”

## Opening Reflection

Holy Week begins with a procession. But it is not the only procession in Jerusalem that day.

Roman historians tell us that during Passover—when the city swelled with pilgrims remembering Israel’s liberation from empire—the Roman governor would lead a military procession into the city from the west, complete with horses, armor, and imperial spectacle to remind the people:

**“There will be no liberation here—not unless we grant it.”**

Jesus enters from the opposite direction—not on a war horse, but on a borrowed donkey.

Two processions.

Two visions of power.

Two theologies of salvation.

Two ways of organizing the world.

The shouting crowd was not merely being festive. They were invoking the language of anti-imperial hope:

**“Hosanna!” means not “hooray!” but “Save us!”**

- Save us from empire.
- Save us from occupation.
- Save us from violence.
- Save us from poverty.
- Save us from systems that crush the vulnerable.

If Palm Sunday had no political stakes, Rome would not have crucified him by Friday.

Crucifixion was not a private religious punishment.

It was a state-sanctioned execution reserved for those who threatened imperial control—particularly those who stirred the imagination of the oppressed. Jesus was killed not for claiming to be divine, but for claiming that another world was possible. Oppression always becomes most violent when people begin to hope.

## **Hosanna Now: For Our Time**

To cry “Hosanna” today is to cry out against:

- anti-trans laws
- anti-immigrant policies
- racist policing
- mass incarceration
- book bans and censorship
- anti-Semitism and Islamophobia
- attacks on bodily autonomy
- austerity and poverty wages
- and Christian nationalism that baptizes domination

It is to demand another world and to refuse to be told it is impossible.

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. Which procession does the church follow today—the imperial parade or the donkey’s procession?
2. What systems in our world deal in death, scarcity, or exclusion?
3. Who is being crucified by modern forms of empire?
4. Where is the Spirit stirring public imagination for liberation?
5. What does it cost to stay with the movement when things turn dangerous or unpopular?
6. How might our cry of “Hosanna!” shape the work of our congregation or community?

## **Prayer**

God of palms and passion, God who rides a borrowed donkey into the streets of resistance—save us from the powers that crucify, from the systems that grind your beloved down, from the silence that protects violence. Give us courage to join the procession of liberation, to refuse the parade of empire, and to cry out “Hosanna!” with our voices, our bodies, and our lives. Amen.

*Beloved, as we enter the holiest week of our tradition, may you walk the path Jesus walked not toward private piety, but toward public solidarity. May you choose the donkey over the war horse, the tear over the sword, the street over the palace, the cross-bearing love that refuses to kill, and the resurrection hope that refuses to die.*

*Hosanna.*

*And may the God of liberation hear our cry.*

# GOOD FRIDAY

Reading:

John 18:1–19:42

“They cried out, ‘Crucify him!’”

“Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

## **Opening Reflection**

Good Friday refuses sentimentality.

It does not rush toward resurrection. It does not soften the violence. It does not explain suffering away.

Good Friday insists that we look fully, honestly, without flinching at what empire does to bodies that threaten its power.

Jesus is not killed in secret. He is executed publicly, legally, and intentionally. This is not an accident of history. It is how systems protect themselves.

Crucifixion was a tool of terror. It was designed to:

- humiliate
- isolate
- silence
- deter resistance
- warn the population

Rome did not crucify random people.

Rome crucified those who disrupted order, challenged authority, and stirred hope among the oppressed.

Jesus is executed because:

- he proclaimed another reign
- he disrupted economic exploitation
- he refused religious gatekeeping
- he centered the poor and marginalized
- he exposed the lie that domination equals peace

Good Friday names this plainly:

**Jesus is killed by the state with the cooperation of religious authorities.**

## **Silence Without Closure**

The stone is rolled in place.  
The body is sealed away.  
The story does not resolve.

Good Friday ends without hope spoken aloud.

Because some days do.

This is the holy truth Good Friday gives us:

***God is present even when there is no resolution yet.***

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. Where do we see crucifixion at work in our world today?
2. Whose suffering is being justified as “necessary” or “inevitable”?
3. Where has the church aligned with power instead of protecting the vulnerable?
4. What does it mean to stay when we cannot fix what is broken?
5. Whose cries are we being called to hear—and not explain away?
6. What truths must be named before resurrection can be honest?

## **Prayer**

God of the crucified, We do not rush past this day. We name the violence. We honor the dead. We lament the systems that still kill in your name. Stay with those whose bodies are broken by power. Stay with those who grieve without answers. Stay with those who resist and pay the price. Teach your church to tell the truth, to refuse cheap hope, and to remain present until justice and life rise again.

Amen.

*Beloved, There is no triumph today.*

*Only truth.*

*Only grief.*

*Only presence.*

*May you have the courage to stay,  
the honesty to lament, and the  
faith to believe*

*that love does not end at the cross—  
even when resurrection has not yet come.*

# EASTER SUNDAY

Reading:

Matthew 28:1–10

“Do not be afraid.”

“He has been raised.”

## **Opening Reflection**

Easter morning begins in the company of women who refused to abandon the movement.

While others fled, hid, or denied the women stayed. They stayed at the cross. They stayed at the burial. They stayed in grief. They stayed in solidarity. And now they are the first to witness resurrection.

Easter begins not with triumph, but with tears and courage.

## **“He Is Not Here” — God Refuses the Logic of Empire**

Rome built crosses to proclaim that resistance ends in death. Easter answers: **No, it does not.**

Rome sealed the tomb to prove control over bodies. Easter answers: **Bodies are not yours to control.**

Empire says violence is final.

Easter says: **Violence is not ultimate.**

Empire says some lives are expendable. Easter says: **No life is disposable.**

The state’s message is always: **Fear.**

God’s message is always: **Do not be afraid.**

Fear is the mechanism empire relies on to maintain order. Fear keeps movements small. Fear keeps communities silent. Fear keeps churches neutral. Fear keeps justice “apolitical.” Fear keeps people in closets and shadows.

But resurrection breaks the cycle of fear.

Not by denying the danger—but by refusing to let danger be decisive.

## **The Resurrection Imagination**

Easter reorders what is possible:

- What if trans kids grew old?
- What if immigrants were welcomed?
- What if housing was guaranteed?
- What if disability was honored?
- What if prisons were abolished/transformed?
- What if work did not consume life?
- What if healthcare was free and abundant?
- What if bodies were beloved without condition?
- What if churches protected the vulnerable rather than the status quo?

Resurrection is not optimism. It is imagination working for liberation.

## **Journaling & Reflection Questions**

1. Who are the women at the tomb today — those staying when others abandon the movement?
2. What tombs persist in our world? Who is trapped within them?
3. What would resurrection look like in policy and not just piety?
4. What systems insist that death or suffering are inevitable?
5. How is God calling our faith community to say, “Do not be afraid”?
6. What new world does resurrection invite us to build?

## **Prayer**

God of empty tombs and open futures, Roll away every stone that seals off life, every policy that denies dignity, every law that restricts flourishing. Raise up your beloved from closets, cages, and tombs of despair. Make your church bold in the face of empire, tender in the face of suffering, and fearless in the work of liberation. For Christ is risen, and we are summoned to imagine and build a world where all your people may live, love, and flourish. Amen.

*Beloved of God, May resurrection open before you not as metaphor but as movement— not as escape but as return, not as consolation but as revolution. The world that empire declared impossible is already breaking in.*

*Do not be afraid. Christ is risen. Life is stronger than death. Liberation is stronger than fear. And love is stronger than empire.*

*Alleluia.*

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