

Season of Lent 2021
Weekly Devotional Series
for Mid-Fraser Cluster



A MIDWEEK DEVOTIONAL

time in the Word together

Part 1: Ash Wednesday through to Week 3 of Lent

Lenten Devotional Booklet 2021

This is a devotional booklet created by the clergy and laity of the Mid-Fraser Cluster, to help you stay connected faithfully during the Season of Lent, which starts with Ash Wednesday and ends with Easter Sunday (including Palm/Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday). These passages may or may not be preached on, as the clergy have not planned their sermons that far ahead yet, but our overall goal is to have a preaching/liturgy theme of ecological and environmental hope. This may come through in these devotions, but no guarantee.

May this be a sacred time for you as we continue during the struggles of social isolation in times of Covid-19. Instead of remembering our struggles and difficulties, this is meant as a tool to uplift you and remember that Creation is all around us and can be cause for appreciation, recognition, and connection to God, our Creator.

How to Create a Sacred Space in Your Home

Spend some time thinking about what makes a space sacred for you.

A sacred space can help you pause, unplug, and reflect on the only work that really matters: loving the world, practicing gratitude, and being kind to yourself. Having a designated space in your home for prayer, meditation, or private reflection can be a constant reminder of how important it is to cultivate this sense of awe and wonder in your life.

It can be useful to set an intention before creating your space. What are you seeking to add to your life by setting this space apart in your home? What do you hope to do in this space? How do you honour God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit? Is it something you see yourself using everyday, or just on important holy days, anniversaries, or seasons?

Setting apart a space for rituals and meditation is an act that invites people to make mental, emotional, and energetic space for these practices, as well. A space also serves as a daily reminder to connect with yourself and with the divine.

If free space in your home is limited, get creative. Search for corners of your house that aren't being used. Add a billowy curtain or a screen to a corner that you can tuck away when the space isn't in use. Look for a closet floor, bookshelf, windowsill, or the top of a dresser that you can easily clear out. You could create a portable sacred space by filling a box with objects that are meaningful to you. A sacred space can also be as simple as your favorite chair or a pillow.



Ash Wednesday

Joel 2: 1 – 2, 12 – 17 (Rev. Bill Booth)

Blow the trumpet in Zion;

 sound the alarm on my holy hill.

Let all who live in the land tremble,
 for the day of the LORD is coming.

It is close at hand—

² a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and blackness.

Like dawn spreading across the mountains
 a large and mighty army comes,
such as never was in ancient times
 nor ever will be in ages to come.

¹² Yet even now, says the LORD,
 return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

¹³ rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the LORD, your God,
 for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
 and relents from punishing.

¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
 and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
 for the LORD, your God?

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;
 sanctify a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶ gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation;
 assemble the aged;

gather the children,
 even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,
 and the bride her canopy.

¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar
 let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.

Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD,
 and do not make your heritage a mockery,
 a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples,
 'Where is their God?'"

The Rending of our Hearts

We tend to move towards work righteousness. Let me explain. We seek approval and justifications from God and others by doing things instead of being something. We would rather work to prove our worth than accept our worthiness. Most of us get caught in the cycle of doing this in our relationships as well. It was an ancient habit at the time of the prophet Joel and is a habit now. Part of human nature.

Yet God requires not works, not accomplishment, not actions, as the reading says, not the rending of clothes, and covering ourselves with ashes but the rending of our hearts. We are called to break open our hearts from the encasement of our ego fears. It is Ash Wednesday, day to reflect on our way of living and being. Freedom and grace is offered by and need only open our hearts to receive both.

Questions:

What encases your heart preventing from fully loving and accepting your belovedness? What does your heart need to let go in order to make room for God's presence?

Prayer:

Holy God, help me release from my heart all that prevents me from knowing your presence. Help me to love more fully and accept love more freely. Amen.

Matthew 6: 1 – 6, 16 – 21 (Naida Motut)

To begin, I see each individual as containing small droplets of God inside of each of us, making our bodies holy temples. Since so much of the bible is written in metaphor, I see these passages written that way.

'Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven'

- Implies that by showing off one's religiosity, they are missing the mark – what really counts is the deep internal connection one has with their idea of God – so they miss out on that warm glow one gets from connecting to the God inside – also know as heaven.
2. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4. So that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'
- I see this passage as saying the reward is in the giving, not in the accolades or the acknowledgement of others. And to give from your heart because it is the giving that is the reward.

Concerning Prayer

5. 'And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'

- It is in the act of praying that we receive our 'reward', in connecting with the God-inside, listening for that still small voice that speaks to us so kindly and gently; this is the reward – the connection with the God-inside.

Concerning Fasting

16. 'And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 17. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18. So that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.'

- It seems the reward is in the fasting, not in having others notice you – its an inside job, between you and the God-inside. Put oil on your head and wash your face – by so doing, we are anointing ourselves with oil, a blessing, and washing our face – a purification – making this a holy act that honours the God-inside.

In conclusion Matthew is speaking about going inside of ourselves and developing our own relationship with our God, as we know this loving energy to be.



First Week in Lent

Genesis 9: 8 – 17 (Rev. Tim Bowman)

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." ¹⁷ God said to Noah, "This is

the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Reflection:

God has established a covenant with us, and with...cows? Ants? Jellyfish? What does that mean?

I sometimes raise an eyebrow when, in the Season of Creation, we address the trees and the animals and encourage them to sing praises to God. It seems almost silly, naive. But then I remember Saint Francis of Assisi, who would address the birds as "brother" or "sister." As Pope Francis explains in his encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Francis did not expect the animals to understand or to respond. It is instead a spiritual discipline, a training of the mind in habits of thought that "refus[es] to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled...if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."

Perhaps in this Lenten season when we are reminded "You are dust, and to dust you shall return," we will hear in that a call to reflect that we built of the same stuff as all humanity and all creation. We share a deep and fundamental unity. We do not create ourselves; we are spirit and mind but also biology and nature. We are creatures: we are created by the Spirit of God, and the world is "a sacrament of communion," in which we meet God and neighbour.

Perhaps our Lenten repentance can be a re-turning to the Divine present in everything, and our Lenten discipline can be considering, in every moment, whether we are participating as equals with the natural world, or presuming to be its masters.

Question for Reflection:

If God has established a covenant with me, with humanity, and every creature on earth, what is the nature of that covenant, and how, then, shall I live?

Prayer:

Deepen in me, Holy Spirit, a sense of God's presence. Summon in me, God, respect for the outcast and solidarity with all your creation. Enlighten me, that I might see your face in all that lives.

Mark 1: 9 – 16 (Rev. Tim Bowman)

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Temptation of Jesus

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Reflection:

This rather sparse account from Mark tells us that Jesus was baptized, and identified by God through the action of the Holy Spirit as his Son. The Spirit drove him into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan. He then began his public ministry.

What Mark leaves unsaid, we must infer: these events are connected. His public ministry flows out of his identity as Son of God, and before that can happen, the Spirit must send him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

Why should this be necessary? Why put Jesus in the path of temptation?

While Satan later becomes the Adversary in later Christian thought, the one implacably opposed to God's purposes who leads Christians astray, in the Hebrew Bible (for example Job), Satan is sometimes more like a tester, an inquisitor, a prosecuting attorney. I think maybe this is the Satan we encounter here. Is Jesus really up to the job of being the Son of God? Is Jesus really ready for his public ministry? Let's find out.

In baptism, we die to our old identities and rise with Christ to new life on Easter Sunday. Similarly, Lent is traditionally a 40-day period of preparation for baptism. We follow him into the wilderness to contemplate the journey we are about to commit ourselves to. We consider the temptations and distractions that may pull us away from that journey, and may practice setting aside some of them. We do this because, like Jesus, God names us as children of God and gives us the awesome responsibility of speaking the Word of God to God's world. If we do so out of our own self-interest or fear, we betray that trust.

In today's modern world, and given our practice of infant baptism, forty days of intentional preparation for baptism is not always possible. By taking seriously our Lenten practice, we take seriously our baptism, and our calling from God.

Question:

Do I know what my temptations are? Do I know what my "buttons" are and what pushes them? How can I avoid going astray in my journey?

Prayer:

Help me to find the courage to take the Gospel into the corners of my life that I find difficult, God, but do not make me foolhardy. Give me eyes to see myself clearly, and to find my way. Amen.



Second Week in Lent

Mark 9: 2 – 9

The Transfiguration (Rev. Bill Booth)

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The Coming of Elijah

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Reflection:

Imagine being there that day with Jesus and the others walking up the mountain. Where was Peter James and John expecting and was Jesus saying to them if you think you seen some amazing things just you wait. Jesus shines, the Moses and Elijah appears, and the disciples hear the voice of God. Imagine the intensity of the experience.

It is not the proclamation of the Voice of Jesus status as beloved Son that I think is the poignant rather it is the command to Listen. Listen in way beyond just hearing with our ears but listen with our whole being to the guidance and love we discover in the life and teachings of Jesus, the Christ. Listen to the beloved of God in whatever form they come to you.

Listening is a gift to those who have a message of love or pain. Listening is healing for the voice and the listener. Pause during this busy time and listen to the sounds of the world. Listen for the message of Love from God.

Questions:

How would you have responded to the experience Peter and the others had?
When you listen to the world around with intention what new things do you hear?
What would the voice of God sound like in your heart?
What would God be saying to you now?

Prayer:

Gentle Loving God. Speak and I will listen. Open my heart that I might know your voice and hear once again that I am your beloved. Amen.

Romans 4: 13 – 25 (Rev. Bill Booth)

God's Promise Realized through Faith

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³ Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Reflection:

In this letter to the church in Rome, Paul is attempting to develop the robust understanding of Faith and of Grace. For Paul, Abraham's faithful acceptance of God's promise is reckoned as righteousness. He is made righteous by the act of trusting God. This might imply that we must have enough faith in order to be acceptable in the eyes of God. However, I think it's important to remember the context of this story. Abraham and Sarah are despairing to God without much expectation that the promise of children will be kept. Yet the promise is renewed. The faithfulness is God's to the promise to Abraham and Sarah. For me this is very refreshing as this tells us that we do not in any way earn Grace. It is not our work of faith but that of God. We are accepting, that we are beloved of God, because loving us is the nature of God. It is our acceptance, like Abraham's, that draws into the loving embrace of our Creator.

Questions:

What blessing and promise from God do you to deny yourself?

It is freeing to know that it is God's faithfulness that "saves" us and not our faith?

Prayer:

Gentle Spirit of God. Teach my heart to trust your promises. Ease my doubts so that I always know we are together. Amen.



Third Week in Lent

Exodus 20: 1 – 17 (Barb Mason)

The Ten Commandments

20 Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Reflection:

Moses gave his travellers a list of how to be together successfully, and they struggled to believe him.

The individuals and family groups hearing these rules can not stay in Egypt, they must go on a journey to a new way of living, towards a place they do not know and while traveling, they must become a different people, a cohesive gathering of folk, fit to operate as a group when they arrive at the "Promise Land". Their struggles were many, what will we eat, what will we drink, they might have felt these ideas were not to their liking and might have asked "who's idea was this anyway?" This journey developed a very strong band of people who became a success.

Last year, our way of living took an enormous change for us. We were to stay home to survive. We could only venture out to get bare essentials. On top of this, the experts were giving us our list of “The You Shall Nots!” We grumble. We just want our old life back! Will we become like the cohesive gathering of folks mentioned above? In both cases, we, as they, will become the best peoples through living through the problems.

Questions:

How have the shall nots of the past year been like the community building laws Moses brought to the people?

An enhanced study.

To better understand the similarities between ourselves and this dusty band of travellers, read the **Book of Exodus**, it is not very long and part of our history. You will find chuckles, similarities and things will pop up for you that you may have forgotten. Even if you only get to read **Verse 20**, giving you the total commandments, you may find the time well spent.

Prayer:

Loving God, we know we must be patient, we should do what we are instructed to do, so we can enjoy the rest of our life. We will soon be able to be with our family and friends. We may get annoyed at the “You Shall Nots”, but know in our hearts, this is so we will be here when the pandemic is over. Amen

John 2: 13 – 22 (Penny Bartel) **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Reflection:

I often think of this passage when the churches I’ve attended host events such as bazaars or fairs that use the sanctuary as an additional selling space. I wonder what Jesus would do if he were to enter into the church during one of these events? Would our actions make him angry because we are making his house a marketplace? Or

would God be pleased since we are making good use of the space, building community, and using his tools wisely to raise money for God's work? Personally, I believe that God would not be angry at our use of the space, or for selling within the church. But it has always caused me to pause and wonder and consider.

Jesus' courage in the temple amazes me. To stand up in defiance and proclaim your opposing views to the authorities takes tremendous courage and strength. History brings us many examples of individuals who have shown courage and faith in their beliefs. I think of the lone man confronting the row of tanks in Tiananmen Square on June 5, 1989 and wonder at his courage. Did Jesus stand beside him, giving him strength to show his dissent against the entire Chinese army and government's strength. I think of Greta Thunberg who began her first "skolstrejk" in August 2018 alone, protesting outside the Swedish government buildings, and begging for immediate government action against climate change. Was God cheering her on and giving her strength for this journey? Her courage and enthusiasm built the climate change movement and mobilized thousands of youth all over the world to walk out and speak out against climate change. And then there is Rosa Parks, who stood up to the bus driver in Montgomery, Alabama that demanded that Rosa give up her seat and go stand in the "colored section" of the public transportation. Her actions have earned her the name "mother of the civil rights movement." Was she standing alone, or was Jesus standing beside her?

If I were in the place of Rosa Parks, Greta Thunberg, or the "Tank Man" of Tiananmen Square, would I have the strength and courage to do the same as them? How do I show my faith, when it is in defiance to the mainstream? In standing up against the wrongs I see around me, I am showing my faith. I know that God will bring me strength and courage.

Questions:

1. When I see things going on which are wrong, do I do anything about it? I need to ask Jesus for some of his courage to stand up for the truth and not to give in to those who threaten me.
2. There may be junk and clutter in the temple of my heart too. How can I clear it to provide a sacred space for God today?
3. How do I show my faith and beliefs when it is in defiance of the "norm"? Have I had the opportunity to stand up, at great personal risk, and speak out for someone else, or for a cause?

Prayer:

Jesus, you got really angry in the temple! Are there things about me that make you angry? Do I clutter up the temple of my soul so much that there is little space for you? Help me to treasure the things in my heart that are important to you, to trust in your courage and strength, and to be patient with the things I do not yet understand. Let me be more like you, and Rosa Parks, and Greta Thunberg, and the man in Tiananmen Square, and so many others. Help me to have courage to speak up when I see things that are wrong around me. Help me be part of changing the world to be better, everyday. Amen

