

Touching the Ordinary: Prayers for Lent

A South Coast Resource



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Introduction

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Lent is the time in the Christian calendar when people of faith prepare for Easter, when all creation celebrates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day when we remember our limitations as human beings. Traditionally, Christians of many varieties receive a cross made of ashes on their foreheads, with the words, “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

These words harken back to the story of creation in Genesis, where God creates humanity out of the earth. The Hebrew word for earth (*adama*) used in the story of humanity’s beginning is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to mean the arable land we’re meant to cultivate and farm.¹ And so, our beginning is from the fertile topsoil of the earth... and someday we will again return to that soil.

That imagery feels especially relevant to our place on the South Coast, where farmworkers and farmers spend their days working the topsoil, preparing the ground and the food and flowers that grow from it for the people who will enjoy the harvest. Our time together is bound by the work of caring for the earth; Puente’s programs are designed around—and are necessary because of—the grueling nature of farming. We live in a world that sees a strawberry or artichoke or nasturtium as an object, and not the end product of hours of toil, weeks of nurture, and the scientific mystery of anything that grows from the ground. A strawberry or artichoke or nasturtium are each extraordinary in their existence. In the South Coast, the journey of these wonderful fruits often starts on the other side of our south border.

This late winter, we observe Lent in the midst of an El Niño season, when the rain is breaking through years of drought. The rain joins the sweat and labor of the hands that tend the fields as we all prepare for Easter—the resurrection of something new—and spring.

In this season of Lent, please pray with and for our community with weekly prayers, readings, and a theme word to meditate on. My deep thanks to ELCA Deacon Candidate Amy Westphal who spent time in the summer of 2015 preparing the outline of this resource I share with you.

And remember that no matter what season we’re in, our doors are always open to you and to all. May all strangers find themselves welcome at Puente, until all are welcome everywhere.

Blessings and peace,
Rev. Abby Mohaupt, for the Puente Team

¹ Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist Landscape*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008. 34-5.

Week One

February 10-16

Beginning

*Tree of life and awesome mystery,
In your death we are reborn,
Though you die in all of history,
Still you rise with every morn,
Still you rise with every morn.²*

The simplicity of water that meets the soil, the seed, and absorbed by roots and sun, delivered by worn and working hands brings new life to what was barren. It reminds us of our connections. The rhythm of sowing and harvest are often relied upon without knowing those who deliver such a cycle. We remember in the simple yet powerful act of placing food on the table for daily nourishment those who labor for this daily need.

Dolores Huerta said, “Every single day we sit down to eat, breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and at our table we have food that was planted, picked, or harvested by a farm worker. Why is it that the people who do the most sacred work in our nation are the most oppressed, the most exploited?”

It is a simple question that calls us to respond, to prepare for a different way of life that sees the people behind our food and that sees us as part of the larger system.

In this first week of Lent, how are you preparing for something new?

What will you plant?

What will you nurture?

God, help us prepare. Prepare our hearts for this season of Lent, and prepare our bellies for the food that others have prepared for us. Amen.

² Tree of Life and Awesome Mystery. 334 ELW Composer: Marty Haugen (1984)



Week Two

February 17-23

Relationship

*Seed that dies to rise in glory,
May we see ourselves in you,
If we learn to live your story,
We may die to rise anew,
we may die to rise anew*

God sent God's son to be in relationship here on earth with all of creation. This relationship is the ultimate example of how we as human should interact with our fellow neighbor and God.

It is easy to forget that our borders are human-made and that they can be remade. The borders and boundaries between nations have not always been in their places. They can move and shift and be crossed.



God crosses those boundaries in Jesus. When we learn to follow this example we learn also to share Christ's love to build up the body of Christ. We often neglect the neighbor or see the neighbor as "other." Immigration issues bring up how we vision relationship with our neighbor. Those who migrate to and from a particular space are also created in the image of God and we often disconnect from this concept. It is up to us to change the boundaries that separate us. God forgive us for our disconnect—help us see those we do not notice and give us hands to work for those whom you have created in your image.

He comes with arms to plant, pluck
He bends, bends bends and reaches reaches, reaches
For food he barely has enough money to buy for himself
At the end of the day the contractor's bus takes him far from town where no one will see
He pays to live in squalor
With the heat—or the wind—slicing the walls of a labor camp.³

God, help us hear the stories of those who bend and labor, who cross borders so we may eat. Helps us build relationships that cross the boundaries we've imposed to separate us from other people. Amen.

³ "Give Me Your Hungry" by Susan Samuels Drake

Week Three

February 24-March 1

Justice in brokenness

*We remember truth one spoken,
love passed on through act and word,
Every person, lost and broken
wears the body of our Lord,
wears the body of our Lord.*

We all come to the cross with our own brokenness, our full humanity. As we come to the cross during Lent we lay down our sorrows, our struggles, and we look at those around us. We ask God for new life, for ourselves and for other people.

In a lot of ways that searching for new life is like the process of composting. What is old and thrown aside must be cast into the dirt, churned under and buried. Only then, with heat and more turning, can new and fertile dirt be created. This new soil—born from the breakdown of organic waste—allows for new things to be planted and to grow.

Each struggle will be different. In the same way, we realize that we are together in this journey with each person bearing their circumstances and struggle. And yet... God lifts us from our struggles when we reach out to know the struggle of another. When we know our neighbor better and know their struggles we know Jesus... and that resurrection is possible, in a new plant and in our lives. Let us take action in our search for justice toward our neighbors.

~

“When we are able to see the benefits of working together, we cannot turn back. We can only move forward. Injustice hurts everyone because we are all members of the same human family: Europeans, Africans, Latinos, Asians; and we struggle for the same dreams. We must give a hand to each other, and together we can change the world.” (Arturo Sepulveda)

God, you call us to trust you in this season, in all the painful processes of life. Help us stay in this season as we prepare for the weeks ahead. Remind us that we are not alone. Amen.



Week Four

March 2-8

Connection

*Gentle Jesus, mighty Spirit,
come inflame our hearts anew,
We may all your joy inherit,
if we bear the cross with you,
if we bear the cross with you.*

In this season of Lent, we listen to our inner being and to the stirring of God's presence in our lives. We are moving closer to resurrection and we ask God to prepare in us a new heart. We pay attention to what has held us back from being the creation God has shaped and molded us to be. We repent for the ways in which we have not been true to our neighbor and we ask for reconciliation that we may move closer to intimate relationship with creation... as we seek out and nurture ourselves in this season of preparation.



Whenever we see ourselves as valuable, we begin to see others as an important part of creation. We begin to see that the food on our table comes from the work of others, and we can eat with gratitude for the toil that makes good food possible.

~

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,

the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

Mary Oliver

God, you call us into a family that is larger than ourselves. Help us see the connections, with love and thanksgiving. Amen.

Week Five

March 9-15

Justice toward God

*Christ you lead and we shall follow,
stumbling though our steps may be,
One with you in joy and sorrow,
we the river you the sea,
we the river you the sea*

In these last weeks of Lent, we can become impatient. And yet, right before harvest is not the time to rush the plants, to push the crops.

God we often live in this world without direction. We must remember that you have provided us the greatest promise: that you will never leave our sides in the great unknown that is life. You have given us Christ, your Child, in order to know the way. We should return lift our every praise to you, living our lives as a living sacrifice for your glory. Through prayer we ask you to remind us of all you have provided and how you call us into deeper relationship with you and all creation.

May we not stumble in these final days.

And I am your children, and I am millions
And I wanted to sell out, I wanted to try
But you know that the sky got too low
And the ocean got too high

God, you lead us in this time of preparing and waiting. Give us patience as we see joy in the coming days, even when the days get long and difficult. Amen.



~

And I, I had to take God into my own hands
Am I too late? Is it over?
Have I sacrificed my family to the great unknown?
There's a war between my conscience and the great unknown

Dar Williams, "The Great Unknown"

Week Six

March16-23

Love

Maundy Thursday

Jesus said: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

—John 13:34

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people's plight.
Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.
Help me to take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.
Grant me courage to serve others;
For in service there is true life.
Give me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.
Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the spirit will be alive among us.
Let the spirit flourish and grow;
So we will never tire of the struggle.
Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.
Help us love even those who hate us;
So we can change the world.
-Cesar Chavez



On this night when we remember that Jesus Christ served those he loved, we remember those who serve us with their bodies and hands. So often their lives are broken by their work, and so tonight we love them, with gratitude, for they have given us life. From the land and from the work of many comes the food that sustains us. May we remember, and may we be changed.

God, remind us that all people have been made in your image. Help us change the world and serve others, even as we have been served. Amen.

Good Friday

This is the night when we are planted in the darkness, when we face that death comes even for Jesus. We remember that when we change systems that are unjust—whether they are food systems that rely on the poverty of farm workers or social systems of oppression that rendered Jesus’ ministry necessary—when we change these systems, we face anger and the possibility of destruction.

Tonight it may feel like the end is all there is. Jesus on the cross seems like an impossibility, and like the breaking of God’s promise to us that God will be our God and we will be God’s peoples. Hope seems lost.

I came to you as the least of your brothers and sisters;
I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,
Naked and you did not clothe me,
Sick and in prison and you did not visit me,
And you have prepared a cross for your Savior.⁴
Lord, have mercy.

In the darkness that comes, may we remember the ground we’ve been preparing all these weeks. We must stay in the darkness, but we are not alone. Do not be afraid.

⁴ The Book of Common Worship

Easter Sunday

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher"). Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

John 20:11-18

We plough the fields, and scatter the good seed on the land;
But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand:
God sends the snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
Are sent from heaven above,
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord
For all God's love.*

We thank Thee, then, Creator, for all things bright and good,
The seed time and the harvest, our life, our health, and food;
No gifts have we to offer, for all Thy love imparts,
But that which Thou desirest, our humble, thankful hearts.

Matthias Claudius



God of the impossible and of life everlasting, we give you thanks on this day of resurrection. Help us work for life and justice for all people. You are risen! Help us rise too. Alleluia! Amen.