



LENT GUIDE 2017

WHAT IS LENT?

Forty is a significant number in the bible. The rains flooded the earth for 40 days. Israel sat in Egypt for 400 years (40x10). The Israelites wandered the desert for 40 years. There were 400 years of silence before Jesus came. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness before being tempted by Satan.

The number forty represent purging, cleansing, and preparation for God's people. It is no wonder that early in Church history the followers of Jesus began observing a 40 day period around these themes. The season of Lent is the 40 days (minus Sundays) prior to Easter. Earliest references to Lent seem to be a time of training for new converts before being baptized on the day before Easter. Baptisms would only occur once a year. Later it became a season of focusing more broadly on discipleship and dying to self.

"Lent comes from the Old English word Lencten, which means Springtime. In this season, one begins to see the goodness which emerges from the darkness of Winter. But the darkness of Winter is necessary for the greening of Spring." Chuck DeGroat

There are many practices that are associated with Lent such as fasting and self-denial. Additionally, there are special prayer services in Lent such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday. We will invite the Missio Family into these practices and services. Yet it is important for us to remember that these practices and services are not ends in themselves. They are means to an end. The end is to take a season to refocus on what it means to follow Jesus. The end is that we would be more faithfully focused followers of Jesus.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1-10, how do you rate your discipleship of Jesus over the first 2 months of 2017? What factors lead you to that number?
2. Have you been baptized? If so, how does your baptism remind and motivate you to follow Jesus? If not, would you consider being baptized on Easter this year? We invite you to see Lent as a season of preparation and training.
3. What in your life needs to be purged, refined, or prepared in order for you to more faithfully follow Jesus?

JOINT LENTEN PRAYER SERVICES

Our Missio Tempe family will be joining with University Lutheran Church for 3 Lenten services. Each service begins at 6:30PM sharp in the sanctuary of ULC and should last about 60 minutes. Childcare will NOT be provided. Of course if your children are able to sit for an hour and participate in the service, they are welcome.

- **Ash Wednesday** (March 1). The ashes remind us that we are made from dust and to dust we will return. They remind us of our humanity and our neediness for God's salvation.
- **Maundy Thursday** (April 13). Remembering Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples.
- **Good Friday** (April 14). Remembering Jesus' sacrifice for sins on the cross.

CALLING THE MISSIO FAMILY TO FAST

Usually when we think of fasting, we think of giving something up. And to be fair, that is usually how we talk about Lent: "What are you giving up for Lent?" But this year we invite you into a different kind of fast. Our Old Testament reading a few weeks ago was from Isaiah 58 where God calls Israel out for their hypocritical fasting. He then asks them:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them,
and not to turn away from your own flesh and
blood?

This year we are inviting each individual and family in Missio to prayerfully consider how they might intentionally fast in light of these words. It might look different for each of us. The hope is that the consistent choice to embrace generosity will mean that we can't continue to give out of excess. Eventually, even for Americans, it will cut into and require sacrifice of your budget, your time, your food, your relaxing nights, your craft room. When our generosity cuts into what we believe is "ours" we are starting to get closer to what Jesus invites us into.

"No act of virtue can be great if it is not followed by advantage for others. So, no matter how much time you spend fasting, no matter how much you sleep on a hard floor and eat ashes and sigh continually, if you do no good to others, you do nothing great." - John Chrysostom

Here is a brainstorm of 7 potential ideas for Isaiah 58-style fasting. You can take these ideas or pray through how the Spirit wants you to fast.

1. **“Share your food with the hungry.”** I commit to going to the grocery store each of the 40 days during Lent and purchasing a non-perishable food item. I’ll put the food items in the box at the entrance to the ULC sanctuary. All donations go to helping students who are food insecure.
2. **“Loose the chains of injustice.”** I will take a break from social media for Lent. In lieu of checking status updates, I commit to educating myself on the injustice of our culture by reading two books and watching two documentaries on racial injustice. (Books: Divided by Faith, The New Jim Crow; Documentaries: 13th,)
3. **“Share your food with the hungry.”** Each Monday during Lent, our family will do a picnic dinner. We will make extra food and go to a public place in our city where there are homeless people. We will invite our homeless neighbors to share our dinner with us.
4. **“When you see the naked, to clothe them.”** There are teenagers in our city who do not have clothes to wear to school. I will give up eating lunch out and getting coffee during Lent. I’ll take the money that I would have spent on that and go buy new socks and underwear for 13-18 year olds. I’ll bring them to Missio and they will be donated to Threadz at Tempe and Marcos de Niza high schools.
5. **“Do not turn away from your own flesh and blood.”** People who sit at the corner of our streets with signs are human beings created in the image of God. I commit to, at the least, making eye contact and smiling as I see people on the corner OR I will have a prepared bag of snacks in my car to hand out OR we will invite a homeless person to join us for a burger across the street at McDonalds each week (or The Habit if you want to go big).
6. **“Provide the poor wanderer with shelter.”** Is there someone you know who could benefit from 40 days with no rent to get back on their feet? Someone currently experiencing homelessness that you know? What if you committed to sheltering them in your extra room, or a not so extra room so that they could have shelter, a community, and time to save over the season of Lent? (Use wisdom, prayer, and discernment from your community on this one.)
7. **“Loose the chains of injustice”** There are many throughout the globe who exist on less than 2 dollars a day. We commit as an MC to forgo our normal weekly family meal and substitute it with beans and rice. We will gather all the regular funds we would have spent on our meals during Lent to financially bless a community or individual in a developing country and loose the chains of economic injustice they live with.

Remember, the end goal of Lent is not the fast or the doing of good deeds. The end goal is our refocussing on what it means to follow Jesus. May our Lenten fasts lead us to Jesus.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Is the Lord calling you to do a Lenten fast? If so, what is it?
2. Isaiah 58:3-5 and Matthew 6:16-18 warn of wrong ways to fast. How could you be susceptible to these dangers? How will you fast in such a way to avoid these?
3. What do you hope the Spirit will do in you as a result of your fast?

SCRIPTURE READING PLAN

For those who have struggled of late to find a good rhythm of soaking in God's Word, perhaps the 40 days of Lent could be a good opportunity to form new habits and find a healthy rhythm of reading. Below are the lectionary passages for each week. The Sunday services will include each of the passages with the sermon being from the Gospel passage. On Monday you could simply read through each of the passages. Tuesday through Friday spend time meditating on each of the four passages, one each day. Then on Saturday, read them aloud as a family or missional community and discuss which one spoke the most to you throughout the week.

Week of Ash Wednesday (March 1-4)

Isaiah 58:1-2, Psalm 51:1-17, 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6 & 16-21

First Week of Lent (March 5-11)

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

Second Week of Lent (March 12-18)

Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4:1-5 & 13-17, John 3:1-17

Third Week of Lent (March 19-25)

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

Fourth Week of Lent (March 26-April 1)

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

Fifth Week of Lent (April 2-8)

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

Sixth Week of Lent (April 9-15)

Psalm 118:1-2 & 19-29, Matthew 21:1-11

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What has been healthy and unhealthy about your scripture intake thus far this year? What is working? Where do you hope to grow?
2. What is your plan for interacting with God's Word during Lent?
3. Who will you involve in both your reading and obeying the texts each week?