



# Lent 2021

A six-week study series in the Gospels.

Lent 'is a school of repentance, to which each Christian must go every year in order to refresh the understanding of his faith'.

Alexander Schmemmann

Lent is a special time in the church's calendar. Every year, beginning on Ash Wednesday, Christians throughout the world observe forty days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving—all with a view to preparing for the celebration of the Lord's resurrection at Easter. It is a solemn but joyful time: a season in which we expose our busy, messy, broken lives to the light of the gospel, learning to hear anew its call to turn away from our sins and return to God our creator and saviour. In interrupting our daily routine and reclaiming our attention to God's word, Lent serves as a 'school of repentance', in which Christ teaches us to see ourselves and others more clearly and truly than before.

## Reading with the saints

The reading of scripture is a central element of the church's observance of Lent. During Lent, we take time with God's word; we make room for it, clearing space in our schedules to study the words of the prophets and apostles, to ponder their meaning, and to hear God speak to us through them. As we do so, we find ourselves in good company. When we read the Bible, we are never truly alone. We belong to a great company

of those past and present who also have turned to scripture in faith, seeking the face of God in the pages of the Bible. We are not the first or only students in the school of repentance.

So it is that during Lent, as each of us dedicates time each day to the reading of scripture, we enter an ongoing conversation that spans the generations and reaches across the boundaries of nations, cultures, and denominations. This is part of what it means to belong to the communion of saints.

## The three pillars of Lent

The religious practices traditionally associated with Lent may be traced to the church's reading of scripture. In the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus referring to three activities mentioned in the law of Moses: giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting. In much of the Christian tradition, these practices have come to be regarded as the three pillars of Lent. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, they are 'traditional signposts along the journey of Lent, pointing out how to respond to the call to "return to God with all your heart"'.

Not all Christians, of course, observe Lent; and among those who do, there is some considerable disagreement about how best to understand the meaning of Lent and the significance of the three practices most closely associated with it. The churches of the Reformation, including the Church of Scotland, historically have taken special care to insist that Lenten observance is neither compulsory nor meritorious. And many Protestant Christians continue to view Lent with some nervousness. Nevertheless, even such a redoubtable Reformer as John Calvin recognised that fasting, prayer, and almsgiving—when they are undertaken with the right intentions and aims—can be of great spiritual benefit. And today, many Protestant churches have begun to take renewed interest in Lent, finding value in the call to prepare for Easter by living deliberately for a little while, with a heightened sense of our need for God's forgiveness, renewal, and direction.

The question Lent puts to us, then, is not: 'What will you be giving up this year?', but rather: 'What does it mean to take up our cross and follow Christ, so that by sharing in his death we might share in his resurrection life?' The practices of Lent are signposts along the road leading to the cross, which is itself the gate that opens to eternal life.

# Sharing Lent together

There are many ways in which we might undertake ‘the journey of Lent’ together. The programme set forth here offers one way that may prove congenial and convenient.

The programme unfolds over six weeks, beginning during the week of Ash Wednesday. At the heart of the programme is a weekly online meeting (a concession to the current restrictions on in-person gatherings). Each week, we will discuss a biblical text; share our experiences of Lent; and join together in prayer. The meetings, which will take place on Zoom, are open to all.

In what follows, you will find a set of readings for each week. They are arranged in a fourfold pattern:

- 1) A passage from scripture: The texts, drawn from Matthew and Luke, are chosen from among those traditionally read during Lent. They are cited here in the New International Version; you may find that reading these gospel passages in another translation alongside the NIV can help to generate fruitful lines of reflection and conversation.
- 2) A brief scriptural comment: Each week’s scriptural passage is accompanied by an extract from a biblical commentary or sermon. These extracts have been selected from a wide range of sources. Taken together, they represent something of the breadth of the Christian exegetical tradition; individually, they may provide insights and provoke questions that will inspire you to further study.
- 3) A poem or hymn: These stand in a less direct relation to the week’s biblical passage. In some cases, they clearly reflect the scriptural text they accompany; in others, they explore a Lenten theme; in still others, they offer a way of seeing the world at some remove from that proposed by scripture. In every case, they invite slow and careful reading.
- 4) A prayer: Drawn from an ecumenical cast of theologians, these prayers include both those traditionally used during Lent (thus the Lenten Prayer of St Ephrem) and those that may help us give expression to the joy and sorrow, the gratitude and need of which we become newly aware as we complete our journey through Lent.

Join one of our weekly Zoom study groups:

1) Wednesdays, 2 to 3 p.m.  
17 February to 24 March

Meeting ID: 957 1011 7833  
Passcode: 277084

2) Thursdays, 7 to 8 p.m.  
18 February to 25 March

Meeting ID: 951 8301 6683  
Passcode: 019631

## Week 1: Getting Started

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I  
begun,  
Which was my sin, though it  
were done before?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin,  
through which I run,  
And do run still, though still I do  
deplore?  
When thou hast done, thou hast  
not done,  
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I  
have won  
Others to sin, and made my sin  
their door?  
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I  
did shun  
A year or two, but wallow'd in, a  
score?  
When thou hast done, thou hast  
not done,  
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I  
have spun  
My last thread, I shall perish on  
the shore;  
But swear by thyself, that at my  
death thy Son  
Shall shine as he shines now, and  
heretofore;  
And, having done that, thou hast  
done;  
I fear no more.

John Donne,  
'A Hymn to God the Father'

Conversation: What should we do (and not do) during Lent?  
17 February, 2-3 p.m. *or* 18 February, 7-8 p.m.

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

'Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

'So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. ...

'When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'

*According to Augustine, the Christian life is not simply a matter of what you do or refrain from doing. It is a matter of why you do what you do; it is a matter of your intentions, which may be hidden from others but are never hidden from God. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are always confronted by the temptation to do good not simply and purely in honour of God and for the good of God's people, but for other, more self-centred reasons. Matthew 6 warns us of this temptation, and cautions us not to give in to it.*

O Lord and Master of my life,  
take from me the spirit of sloth,  
despair, lust of power, and idle  
talk.

But give rather the spirit of  
chastity, humility, patience, and  
love to Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me  
to see my own transgressions,  
and not to judge my brother, for  
blessed art Thou, unto ages of  
ages. Amen.

St Ephrem

‘[I]f those among whom you live fail to praise you for living an upright life, they are at fault; if they praise you, then you are in danger unless you keep your heart so simple and clean that you will not perform your good works for the sake of human praise. If you have such a heart, you will rejoice because they bestow their praise, and not because you receive it; for their praise of you shows that the good is pleasing to them, though you would lead an upright life even if no one were to praise you for it. Moreover, you know that the praise you are receiving is of advantage to those who are bestowing it, if they mean it, not as an honour to you in your work, but as an honour to God, whose most holy temple is every man who lives an upright life. ... [A] man is not to perform a good deed for the sole purpose of pleasing men. If his sole aim is the receiving of human praise, then he will be inclined to simulate the good, for, since men cannot gaze into the heart, they may praise even what is spurious. But whenever a man simulates goodness, he has a divided heart. Therefore, no one has a single [or ‘clean’] heart unless he rises above human praise while he is living an upright life—that is to say, unless his thoughts and his efforts to please are directed solely toward Him who alone is the discernor of conscience. Whatever proceeds from the purity of such a conscience is the more deserving of praise according as it is less desirous of the praise which men bestow... [Christ] has not forbidden us to practise righteousness in the presence of men, but that He has forbidden us to practise it in their presence for the purpose of being seen by them. This means that we are not to direct our intention toward that end and make it our aim’.

St. Augustine, *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*,

## Week 2: Fasting

Conversation: The experience and meaning of fasting

24 February, 2-3 p.m. *or* 25 February 7-8 p.m.

*Matthew 4.1-11*

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'. Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"'.  
Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone"'. Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"'.  
Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you', he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"'.  
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread'. Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God"'.  
Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God', he said, 'throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone"'. Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test"'.  
Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you', he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"'.  
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Then the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you', he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"'.  
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'All this I will give you', he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"'.  
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

§

*Unlike many earlier commentators, John Calvin did not think we should find in the story of Jesus' journey into the wilderness the model for our own extended time of praying and fasting during Lent. 'Christ did not fast to set an example for others', he wrote, 'but to prove in so beginning to proclaim the gospel, that it was no human doctrine but actually one sent from heaven' (Institutes, 4.12.20). In the same way that Moses (Exodus 24:18, 34:28) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:8) each went without food and water for forty days before receiving and proclaiming God's word to Israel, so Christ fasted for forty days before he began publicly to announce the good news of the kingdom of God.*

'There were two reasons why Christ withdrew into the wilderness. The first was, that, after a fast of forty days, he might come forth as a new man, or rather a heavenly man, to the discharge of his office. The next was, that he might be tried by temptation and undergo an apprenticeship, before he undertook an office so arduous, and so elevated. Let us therefore learn that, by the guidance of the Spirit, Christ withdrew from the crowd of men, in order that he might come forth as the highest teacher of the church, as the ambassador of God, — rather as sent from heaven, than as taken from some town, and from among the common people....

Above my head the great pine-  
branches tower;  
Backwards and forwards each to  
the other bends,  
Beckoning the tempest-cloud  
which hither wends  
Like a slow-laboured thought,  
heavy with power:  
Hark to the patter of the coming  
shower!  
Let me be silent while the  
Almighty sends  
His thunder-word along—but  
when it ends  
I will arise and fashion from the  
hour  
Words of stupendous import, fit  
to guard  
High thoughts and purposes,  
which I may wave,  
When the temptation cometh  
close and hard,  
Like fiery brands betwixt me  
and the grave  
Of meaner things—to which I am  
a slave,  
If evermore I keep not watch  
and ward.

George MacDonald,  
'Provision'

Almighty God, merciful Father,  
and my good Lord, have mercy  
on me, a sinner.

Grant me forgiveness of my sins.  
Make me guard against and  
overcome all snares, tempta-  
tions, and harmful pleasures...

May I act and think in all things  
according to your will, purely,  
soberly, devoutly, and with a  
true and effective mind.

Let me know your command-  
ments, and love them, carry  
them out readily, and bring  
them into effect. Always, Lord,  
let me go on with humility to  
better things and never grow  
slack.

Lord, do not give me over either  
to my human ignorance and  
weakness or to my own deserts,  
or to anything, other than your  
loving dealing with me. Do you  
yourself in kindness dispose of  
me, my thoughts and actions,  
according to your good  
pleasure, so that your will may  
always be done by me and in  
me and concerning me.

St Anselm

I must explain what was the object of Christ's fasting. Satan availed himself of our Lord's hunger as an occasion for tempting him. ... [But] why was it the will of God that his Son should be tempted? ... God intended, I have no doubt, to exhibit in the person of his Son, as in a very bright mirror, how obstinately and perseveringly Satan opposes the salvation of men. For how comes it, that he attacks Christ more furiously, and directs all his power and forces against him, at the particular time mentioned by the Evangelists, but because he sees him preparing, at the command of the Father, to undertake the redemption of men? Our salvation, therefore, was attacked in the person of Christ, just as the ministers, whom Christ has authorized to proclaim his redemption, are the objects of Satan's daily warfare.

It ought to be observed, at the same time, that the Son of God voluntarily endured the temptations, which we are now considering, and fought, as it were, in single combat with the devil, that, by his victory, he might obtain a triumph for us. Whenever we are called to encounter Satan, let us remember, that his attacks can in no other way be sustained and repelled than by holding out this shield: for the Son of God undoubtedly allowed himself to be tempted, that he may be constantly before our minds, when Satan excites within us any contest of temptations. When he was leading a private life at home, we do not read that he was tempted; but when he was about to discharge the office of Redeemer, he then entered the field in the name of his whole church. But if Christ was tempted as the public representative of all believers, let us learn, that the temptations which befall us are not accidental, or regulated by the will of Satan, without God's permission; but that the Spirit of God presides over our contests as an exercise of our faith. This will aid us in cherishing the assured hope, that God, who is the supreme judge and disposer of the combat, will not be unmindful of us, but will fortify us against those distresses, which he sees that we are unable to meet.'

John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*

## Week 3: Prayer

Conversation: What do we want from God?

3 March, 2-3 p.m. *or* 4 March, 7-8 p.m.

*Matthew 7:7-11*

Prayer, the Church's  
banquet, Angels' age,  
God's breath in man  
returning to his birth,  
The soul in paraphrase, heart  
in pilgrimage,  
The Christian plummet  
sounding heav'n and earth;  
Engine against th' Almighty,  
sinner's tower,  
Reversed thunder, Christ-  
side-piercing spear,  
The six-days' world  
transposing in an hour,  
A kind of tune, which all  
things hear and fear:  
Softness, and peace, and joy,  
and love, and bliss,  
Exalted manna, gladness of  
the best,  
Heaven in ordinary, man well  
dressed,  
The milky way, the bird of  
Paradise,  
Church bells beyond the  
stars heard, the soul's blood,  
The land of spices;  
something understood.

George Herbert,  
'Prayer (I)'

'Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

'Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'

§

*Martin Luther's interpretation of this passage from the Sermon on the Mount rests on the insight that Christ exhorts his disciples to persevere in prayer just at the moment that he is preparing them to go out and preach the gospel of the kingdom. The question Luther puts to us is this: What gets in the way of us proclaiming the good news? Whatever it is, we must take it to God in prayer.*

'After the Lord Christ had taught his disciples, and established the office of the ministry, so that they might know what they were to preach and how they were to live, he here adds an exhortation to prayer; he means hereby to teach that prayer [next to and together with preaching] is the principal work of a Christian.... Thus he now means to say: I have instructed you, that you may know how you ought to live aright and against what you should be on your guard. Now a necessary part of this is that you also pray, and confidently persevere with seeking and knocking, not becoming sluggish or weary in regard to it. For there will be need of begging, seeking, and knocking. For although both doctrine and practice have rightly begun, yet there will be no want of faults and offenses, that daily hinder and obstruct us, so that we cannot advance, and against which we continually contend with all our powers, but without any stronger defense than prayer, so that if we do not use this it is not possible for us to maintain our ground and remain Christians; as we can see very plainly now what kind of hindrances resist the progress of the gospel....



Heavenly Father, dearest God, I  
am an unworthy, poor sinner,  
not worthy to lift my eyes or  
hands to you or to pray. But  
since you have commanded us  
all to pray, and since you have  
promised to hear, and since you  
have taught us by word and  
example through your dear Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
I come to you, in view of your  
command, in obedience to you.  
And relying on your gracious  
promise, and in the name of my  
Lord Jesus Christ, with all your  
holy Christians on earth,  
I pray as he has taught me:  
Our Father...

Martin Luther

Now what the need is, for which he gives this exhortation, and which should urge us to pray, has been mentioned, so that, if we have the word of God, and have made a good beginning, both in doctrine and practice, then there cannot fail to occur temptation and opposition, not of one kind only but of thousands of kinds. For, in the first place, there is our own flesh, the old rotten sack, that is soon apathetic, inattentive, and disinclined to the word of God and a good life, so that we are always lacking in wisdom and the word of God, faith, love, patience, etc. This is the first enemy that is daily hanging about our neck so heavily that he is always dragging us in that direction. Then comes the other enemy, the world, that begrudges us the dear word and faith, and will have no patience with us, however weak we may be; it falls upon us and condemns us for what we do, seeks to take from us what we have, so that we can have no peace with it. ...The third enemy is now the strongest of all, the very devil, who has the great double advantage that we are not good by nature, and besides are weak in faith and spirit; he gets thus within my own castle and contends against me; he has in addition the world to aid him, so that he stirs up ugly crowds against me, through whom he shoots his poisonous, fiery darts upon me, that he may weary me, so that the word in me may be again smothered and extinguished, and he rule again as he ruled before, and prevent himself from being driven out. See, these are three misfortunes that oppress us heavily enough and lie upon our neck, and will not cease whilst we have life and breath. Therefore we have constant reason to pray and to call. Therefore he adds these words: Ask, seek, knock; to show that we do not yet have everything, but that we are in such a condition that there is failure and want everywhere. For if we had it all we would not need to beg or seek; if we were even in heaven already, we would not need to knock.'

Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*

## Week 4: Works of Mercy

Conversation: Lent as a season of mercy

10 March, 2-3 p.m. *or* 11 March, 7-8 p.m.

*Matthew 25:31-46*

The quality of mercy is not  
strain'd.  
It droppeth as the gentle  
rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It  
is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives,  
and him that takes.  
'Tis mightiest in the  
mightiest; it becomes  
The throned monarch  
better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force  
of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and  
majesty,  
Wherein doth sit the dread  
and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this  
sceptered sway;  
It is enthroned in the heart  
of kings;  
It is an attribute to God  
himself;  
And earthly power doth  
then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons  
justice.

William Shakespeare,  
*The Merchant of Venice*

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me".

'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?". The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me".

'Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me".

'They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?". He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me".

'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life'.

We pray for your church here and in all nations, for the sleeping church, that it may awaken; for the persecuted church, that it may continually rejoice and be assured of what it has in you; and for the confessing church, that it may live not for its own sake, but for your glory.

We pray for the rulers and the authorities all over the world: for the good ones, that you may preserve them; and for the bad ones, that you may either turn their hearts or put an end to their power, all according to your will; and for everyone, that you may advise them that they are and must remain your servants.

We pray that all tyranny and disorder may be fended off, and that all oppressed nations and people may be granted justice.

We pray for the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the helpless, and the troubled, for all who suffer - perhaps from something only you know - that you yourself may comfort them with the hope of your kingdom.  
Amen.

Karl Barth

*In Matthew's Gospel, this parable stands as the conclusion to Jesus' response to the question put to him by the disciples: 'What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?' (Matt. 24:3). Like many Christians today, Stanley Hauerwas suggests, the disciples were 'desperate to have a handle on history'. Jesus, Hauerwas notes, does not immediately answer their question. Rather, speaking in vivid symbols and stories, he teaches his disciples patiently to await his return, serving him by serving 'the least' of his brothers and sisters. In doing so, they will be a living sign of Christ's coming kingdom in a world that does not yet recognise his presence and rule.*

In the climax of Jesus's great sermon occasioned by his disciple's question concerning what sign will signal the coming of the end of the age, Jesus returns to Daniel 7:13-14. The Son of Man comes in glory, and all his angels will be with him. The nations will be gathered before him because he is a king. He is, however, a shepherd-king who will separate the sheep from the goats....

It is significant that the righteous have not known that when they ministered, provided hospitality, and visited that they did all of this to Jesus. They have done what God would have us do and so doing have ministered to Christ himself. All people, whether they are Christians or not, know all they need to know to care for 'the least of these'. The difference between followers of Jesus and those who do not know Jesus is that those who have seen Jesus no longer have any excuse to avoid 'the least of these'.

The disciples now have the answer to their question. Jesus is the sign of the end of the age, making possible for them to have the time, as Jesus did, to feed the hungry (Matt. 14:13-21; 15:32-39), cure the sick, comfort the comfortless (15:21-28), welcome the stranger (8:5-13), and be imprisoned and crucified between two prisoners. This is the work they have witnessed and been given as they have followed Jesus on his journey through the towns of Israel and finally to Jerusalem itself. This is the way they will learn to be watchmen for the kingdom, for by performing the work of the kingdom they will be given the gift of discernment so that they will be able to resist the temptations of the devil.

Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*

## Week 5:

Conversation: Lent as a season of reformation

17 March, 2-3 p.m. *or* 18 March, 7-8 p.m.

*Matthew 21:12-17*

O Word of God incarnate,  
O Wisdom from on high,  
O Truth unchanged,  
unchanging, O Light of our  
dark sky, we praise thee for  
the radiance that from the  
hallowed page, a lantern to  
our footsteps, shines on  
from age to age.

The church from her dear  
Master received the gift  
divine, and still that light  
she lifteth o'er all the earth  
to shine. It is the golden  
casket, where gems of  
truth are stored; it is the  
heav'n drawn picture Of  
Christ, the living Word.

O make thy church, dear  
Savior, a lamp of purest  
gold, to bear before the  
nations thy true light, as of  
old. O teach thy wand'ring  
pilgrims by this their path  
to trace, 'til, clouds and  
darkness ended, they see  
thee face to face.

William How,  
'O Word of God Incarnate'

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 'It is written', he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer", but you are making it a den of robbers'.

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they were indignant.

'Do you hear what these children are saying?' they asked him.

'Yes', replied Jesus, 'have you never read, "From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise"?'.

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.



Detail of Rembrandt, *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*

*John Calvin famously portrays Christ as the one who throughout his entire ministry embodies and fulfils the three great offices of the Old Testament: prophet, priest, and king. It is in discharging this threefold office that Christ enters Jerusalem, visits the temple, and purifies it. In doing so, he both reveals the abuses taking place in God's house and reveals himself as the one to whom God has entrusted the role of leading God's people in true worship. The life of the people of God, Calvin insists, must ever be reformed by the Word of God.*

Almighty, eternal and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, open and illuminate our minds, that we may purely and perfectly understand thy Word and that our lives may be conformed to what we have rightly understood, that in nothing we may be displeasing unto thy majesty, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Huldrych Zwingli

When he made himself known as a Teacher and Prophet sent by God, [Christ] took upon himself the office of purifying the temple, in order to arouse the Jews, and make them more attentive...And yet there is no reason to doubt that he declared himself to be both King and High Priest, who presided over the temple and the worship of God. This ought to be observed, lest any private individual should think himself entitled to act in the same manner. That zeal, indeed, by which Christ was animated to do this, ought to be held in common by all the godly; but lest anyone, under the pretence of imitation, should rush forward without authority, we ought to see what our calling demands, and how far we may proceed according to the commandment of God. If the Church of God have contracted any pollutions, all the children of God ought to burn with grief; but as God has not put arms into the hands of all, let private individuals groan, till God bring the remedy. I do acknowledge that they are worse than stupid who are not displeased at the pollution of the temple of God, and that it is not enough for them to be inwardly distressed, if they do not avoid the contagion, and testify with their mouth, whenever an opportunity presents itself, that they desire to see a change for the better. But let those who do not possess public authority oppose by their tongue, which they have at liberty, those vices which they cannot remedy with their hands.

John Calvin, *A Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*

## Week 6: Returning to God

Conversation: Lent as a time of repentance and reconciliation  
24 March, 2-3 p.m. *or* 25 March, 7-8 p.m.

There is no sorrow worse  
than this sorrow  
The dumb grief of the exile  
among villages that have  
strange names among the  
new rocks.

The shadows are not his  
home's shadows nor the  
tales his tales  
and even the sky is not the  
same nor the stars at night.

Sometimes he sees his  
home in the stars the light  
from its window  
his village trembling and  
vibrating and the old white  
faces mumbling at the fire.

But the strange names  
stand up against him and  
the dryness of the earth  
and the cold barks of the  
dogs and his sails are  
folded in this harbour  
which is not his.

Poor lost exile

For you there is nothing  
but endurance till one  
miraculous day you will  
wake up in the morning  
and put on your foreign  
clothes and know that they  
are at last yours.

Ian Crichton Smith,  
'There is No Sorrow'

*Luke 15:11-32*

Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate". So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants". So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son". But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found". So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come", he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound". The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!". "My son", the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found".'

Come, Holy Spirit, and  
bring from heaven a ray of  
your light!

Come, Father of the poor,  
giver of gifts, light of the  
world, blessed Comforter,  
dear guest of the soul, and  
its sweetest refreshment!  
Our rest in labor, our  
coolness in heat, our  
comfort in affliction!

O most blessed Spirit, fill  
full the hearts of your  
faithful people! Without  
your influence, there is  
nothing in us which is not  
weakness and guilt. Oh,  
cleanse those who are  
filthy. Refresh those who  
are dried up. Heal those  
who are wounded. Bend  
those who are stubborn.  
Cherish in your heart those  
who are cold. Guide those  
who are wandering. Grant  
your servants, who put  
their trust in you, the merit  
of your righteousness. Give  
them final salvation. Grant  
them eternal joy!

Bernard of Clairvaux

*The story of the Prodigal Son, which appears only in the Gospel of Luke, has played an especially important role in shaping the observance of Lent in the Orthodox tradition. In this sermon from 2006, Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and spiritual leader of Eastern Orthodox Christians around the world, finds in this story a call to ‘repent a good repentance’.*

[R]epentance is a process much deeper than mere acknowledgment of our sins or recognition of our errors. Sincere repentance should primarily address the thoughts and reflections, the beliefs and motivations, from which our deeds arise. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that evil thoughts pollute us in the same way as evil deeds—that, in the eyes of God, harboring evil thoughts is tantamount to committing evil. Remaining indifferent toward our fellow human beings, being shut up in our selves and our desires, feeling bitterness toward others, lacking love and feeling hatred, harboring feelings of superiority, self-affectation, ambition, sensuousness, or avarice—all of these make for a person remote from the ideal of the healthy human being. The ideal, healthy human being is characterized by love, humility, meekness, peace, and forgiveness. Therefore, we all need repentance; we all need to change our mentality and perceptions with respect to good and evil, for we are all of us very far from being ideal....

Christ is ready to accept such repentance. All of heaven rejoices when sinners truly repent; indeed, great joy as well as a sense of freedom and relief also overwhelm every Christian who offers genuine repentance. A person who clings to feelings of hatred ultimately inflicts more pain on himself than on others, for the people he traumatizes and hurts may take comfort and transform their pain into prayer and peace. By contrast, the person who envies and hates lives an endless internal suffering.

Therefore, the repentance of every person is inevitable. The time will surely come for each of us when we shall find ourselves face-to-face before the truth; then we will realize how far from true love we were during our life. Blessed is the one who repents like the Prodigal Son; such a person is welcomed by our heavenly Father. Miserable will be the one who refuses to change or repent; for such a person is left without hope. Let us, therefore, listen carefully to the story of the Prodigal Son, beloved children, and let us repent a good repentance.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Speaking the Truth in Love*

## Bibliography

Anselm. 'Prayer to God the Father', in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*. Translated by Benedicta Ward. London: Penguin Books, 1973.

Augustine, Aurelius. *Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount*. Translated by D.J. Kavanaugh. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951.

Barth, Karl. *Fifty Prayers*. Translated by D.C. Stassen. Louisville and London: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2008.

Bernard of Clairvaux. 'Need for Heavenly Refreshment', in *Prayers of the Middle Ages*. Edited by J. Manning Potts. Nashville: The Upper Room, 1954.

Calvin, John. *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, vol. 1. Translated by W. Pringle. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845.

Chryssavgis, John, ed. *Speaking the Truth in Love: Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

Donne, John. 'A Hymn to God the Father'. [poetryfoundation.org/poems/44115/a-hymn-to-god-the-father](http://poetryfoundation.org/poems/44115/a-hymn-to-god-the-father)

Hauerwas, Stanley. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006.

Herbert, George. 'Prayer (I)'. [poetryfoundation.org/poems/44371/prayer-i](http://poetryfoundation.org/poems/44371/prayer-i)

How, William. 'O Word of God Incarnate'  
[https://hymnary.org/text/o\\_word\\_of\\_god\\_incarnate](https://hymnary.org/text/o_word_of_god_incarnate)

'Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem'  
[www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/lenten-prayer-of-st-ephrem](http://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/lenten-prayer-of-st-ephrem)

Locher, G.W. *Zwingli's Thought: New Perspectives*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981.

Luther, Martin. *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*. Translated by C. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1892).

Luther, Martin. 'Ein einfältige Weise zu beten für einen Guten Freund' ['A Simple Way to Pray for a Good Friend'], in *D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 38. Edited by J.K.F. Knaake. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1912.

MacDonald, George. 'Provision'  
<https://verse.press/poem/provision-17966>

Schmemmann, Alexander. *Great Lent: A School of Repentance. Its Meaning for Orthodox Christians*. New York: Orthodox Church in America, 1970.

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*. [shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/full.html](http://shakespeare.mit.edu/merchant/full.html)

Smith, Ian Crichton. *New Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2011.