

## Lent: A Yearly Reminder of the Daily Call to Come Home

Ash Wednesday

### Imagine

Lent is a journey home. Home to the heart of God. To begin, this journey requires that we stop and notice which direction we are going if we're not going home to God!

Close your eyes and with your mind's eye, picture the place where you stop where you are going. Take in the surroundings, is it a familiar place or a new place? What do you notice--see, smell, hear, touch, taste, what feelings are stirred?

Now see Jesus meeting you in this place of stopping. Although we are the ones who need to come home, thankfully we do not make the journey alone. Allow yourself to be greeted by Jesus, you might also greet Him. Is there anything He wants to say to you in this place? Anything He wants to show you about this place?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### Pray

*God, we remember through Ash Wednesday how prone we are to get lost and through Lent, how You are always calling us home. Yet for many of us it is hard to return home to Someone we don't know, have forgotten or fear. Remind us once again or for the first time of the sound of Your voice. "Here is the Voice you're to return to," said Your prophet Joel to Israel, "The Lord is merciful and compassionate, very patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive."*

*As we journey, especially when it is hard, remind us who You are, Lord. We pause in silence to listen once again and allow the prophet's words to make their own journey from our minds to our hearts.*

*You, our God, are:*

*merciful*

*compassionate*

*very patient*

*full of faithful love*

*ready to forgive.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*With Jesus as our guide, we are ready to stop going our own way, to turn around, and come home.  
Amen.*

### Reflect

- Do you believe the prophet Joel's description of the Lord found in Joel 2:12-13? Which aspect is most difficult for you to trust? Ask God to reveal or remind you of this part of God's self.
- As you review your life at the moment (or reflect on how the place you imagined at the beginning intersects with your life right now), what part of you needs to stop where it's going, turn around, and start heading home?
- Putting ashes on the head is a sign of humility, being sorry. Weeping and fasting not only express humble sorrow but they offer cleansing of our hearts, minds & bodies which creates space for God. What are some ways God is inviting you to cleanse and create space during Lent?

Lent

### **Imagine**

Stopping and turning toward home is only the beginning of the journey. Like Israel in the desert and Jesus in the wilderness, we, too, will experience difficulty after our journey home begins.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself coming to a wilderness or desert place soon after you've started the journey home to the heart of God. Take in the surroundings with all of your senses. Become aware of your thirst and hunger. Notice your vulnerability in this place and any temptations presenting themselves.

Now invite Jesus to join you here. He has experience with being in a place of thirst, hunger, and temptation. Is there anything He wants to say to you or show you? Anything He wants to offer you in this place?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, sometimes the journey home to You is hard. We may discover how far away we are from Your path of Life or how the path of Life doesn't always look like it. We may realize how thirsty and hungry our souls really are and find ourselves in places of vulnerability and temptation.*

*In the silence we allow ourselves to become aware of this now—If there are no words, simply allowing the ache of our thirst and hunger. If there are words, perhaps naming what we are deeply thirsting and hungering for and where we feel vulnerable and tempted at this time in our life.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*We need Your help, God, not just helping us to begin or welcoming us at the end of the journey but along the way, too. Help us have the strength to invite You to join us, whether in our personal wilderness or in our community's desert place. Help us to trust that You are with us giving us what we need and reminding us that this desert time, this wilderness, will pass.*

*Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- Having begun your journey home to the heart of God during Lent, what desert or wilderness place(s) are you discovering in your life? In the life of your church community? What temptations are found there at this time? How can you join Moses in Exodus 17:4 by crying out and listening to God in this desert place?
- Whether through purposeful fasting or the difficult experiences life brings, how might places of thirst, hunger, vulnerability, and temptation deepen trust in God? Why is this important for the journey home?
- In your moments of hunger, thirst, vulnerability and temptation, what do you need to remember? In Matthew 4, when in the desert, Jesus remembered who He and His Father were through the words of Scripture. What words do you need to drink deeply, what images do you need to feast on this week?

## Palm Sunday/Passion Sunday

### **Imagine**

As we continue on the path of Life toward home, the glory of who we've been made to be may grow more apparent to those around us. Just as people were full of hope and praise to God when they glimpsed the glory of who Jesus truly was, people are drawn to and often respond with blessing when they get a glimpse of who God has made someone to be.

Close your eyes and imagine people gathered around you at this place on your journey with and toward God. Notice the surroundings and who is present (you may recognize some, others you may not). As they get a glimpse of who God has made you to be, what do their faces and voices say? Allow yourself to receive their blessing.

Now see Jesus among those who are present. What does His face convey to you? Allow yourself to receive His blessing. How do you respond? What does your face say or what might you want to communicate to Jesus?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, when You came to earth, there were those who got glimpses of Your glory, the truth of You. We pause now to join in that glimpse and allow praise of You to rise up in our hearts.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*We ask that You receive our praise and blessing for You know it to be true even though we can be so fickle. And for this reason our hearts instinctively cry out what the crowd cried to You, Jesus, Hosanna—save us, help us! For in this moment we recognize that You are our Savior, our Mighty Helper, and we are in need of You especially when You know how easily we lose heart, how in the next moment we may change our minds. So Hosanna. Hosanna. Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- Ponder the people covering the street with their own garments for Jesus to ride over (signifying honor and victory) and Jesus riding on a humble donkey (rather than a war horse). See Matthew 21 for an overview of the scene. What is stirred in you? What thoughts come as you compare and contrast? What is Jesus revealing about the heart of God in this scene?
- Imagine yourself in the crowd. Hear yourself shout, “Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Repeat it as many times as you desire. Allow it to become your prayer for this day (silent, spoken or even shouted!). You might reflect later on as to your experience of this prayer of praise.
- How might you allow yourself to receive blessing from others and yet continue on your way “home” with Jesus? What is the danger in refusing the blessings of others? What is the danger in staying with the crowd and their blessing for too long?

Holy Thursday

### **Imagine**

Along our journeys, regular remembrance and celebration of God's saving power and sacrificial love can deepen our trust in God's heart. As Jesus shows us, this is of utmost importance especially when betrayal and suffering comes.

Close your eyes and picture yourself stopping to celebrate for a day. You know Jesus has made preparations for this celebration. You are not exactly sure what will happen but you see others gathered alongside you in this place of celebration. In your mind's eye, how do you celebrate and remember God's saving love together? What stories are shared?

Now allow Jesus to tend to you and each person who is gathered with you in whatever way He desires. What does He do? Watch Him and listen to how He invites you to serve and care for others on the journey in the same way. What is your response? Does a particular person or group come to your mind with His invitation?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, You show us kindness from beginning to end. You're our close Companion and our Helper in times of need. We pause to remember and celebrate the ways You have walked with and rescued us on our journey.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*We ask that our deep gladness and Your kindness overflow into the lives of those around us. Help us trust in Your goodness even when those around us do not seek our good.*

*Jesus, You showed us this can be done, for on the same night your friend, Judas, put Your life into the hands of the chief priest who hated You, You were entrusting Yourself into the hands of Your Father who loved You. You and the Father are One, may we trust You and remember Your companionship and goodness even when we cannot see or feel it. And may we be One with You in pouring out the same humble love into our world.*

*Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- The Festival of Passover yearly remembers how God saved Israel from slavery in Egypt. Today you might research Passover, join in this ancient festival by eating unleavened bread (matzo), or consider how you can uniquely mark God's saving power in your life on this day.
- Christian tradition added the observance of Holy Thursday to remember The Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples which occurred on the feast of Passover. The continuation of God's steadfast, saving love even after betrayal is seen once again in Jesus announcing that one of his disciples will betray him and yet he is about to pour out his own blood and body for his friends (see Matthew 26:17-30). Reflect on how your life intersects with and joins in this larger story of betrayal and love.
- Jesus trusted the Father's heart so much that he was able to be honest with his fears and yet still consent to the Father's work in and through Him (see Matthew 26:39). What do you need to be honest with God about? Are you willing to consent to God's work in and through you in this situation? If not, what is keeping you from doing so (remember, be honest!)?

Good Friday

### **Imagine**

Our journey of Love will take unpredictable turns and lead to unexpected places. Some of these places we don't want to go, some of these places others don't want us to go.

Closing your eyes, imagine the landscape of this Way of Love you've been on, what do you picture? Now picture this road taking an unexpected turn. It seems to be heading in the opposite direction than the way you wanted or others expected you to go! Notice the responses provoked in you and others. What will you do?

Allow yourself to see Jesus still with you even as you question and some of your friends and the crowd who once blessed you begin to turn against you. What does Jesus say to you about continuing on? About your cost and loss on this journey?

Let the scene unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, You work in ways that confound and confuse us. Your way of Love led to people shouting that you, Jesus, be killed even though they blessed you days before. Your way of Love led to the cross where you willingly gave up your life. You disrupt our expectations, especially of power. We pause to feel the disruption or give You permission to disrupt us.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*Will we still trust You even when our expectations of You and how our life is supposed to go get disrupted? Do we trust Your heart enough to willingly give up what we hold onto so tightly and place all, even our own lives into Your hands? And when we are left with only confusion and pain, questions and no answers, when we cannot feel Your presence, we ask that Your trustworthy hands hold us. Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- Using Isaiah 52:15 as a lens through which to view Jesus' life and death, what had kings never seen or heard before? Ponder with them.
- Do you have a story in your own life or in the life of another in which following Jesus on the Way of Love cost you or the person deeply? What was the cost? Allow a prayer to be shaped by these memories.
- Much happened on that Friday and many were involved, pick one of these people or objects from the story in John 19:1-37: *Pilate, crown of thorns, purple robe, chief priests, cross, soldiers, notice/sign, Jesus' clothes, jar of wine vinegar*. In your mind's eye, become that person or thing. As that person or object, ask yourself: What is my function or role? What is my greatest fear? What is my greatest hope? Reflect on how this object or person's answers intersect with your own life right now.

Holy Saturday

### **Imagine**

Silence is woven throughout our journey. This silence can be jarring, scary, and unwanted, but it can also be a gift.

Closing your eyes, imagine you've abruptly come to an end in your journey. You had planned to go further and had envisioned what the end would look like and this is definitely not it! Notice the terrain, notice what you're feeling.

You look around and Jesus is nowhere to be found. Now what? Where do your mind, heart, and actions go?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, Your silence can be so difficult, especially when it seems our hope has died and been laid to rest in a stone sealed tomb. In times like these we don't know what to do. Like the disciples after Your death, Jesus, we are overwhelmed with fear, sadness, shock, and disappointment. We want to crawl into the tomb ourselves, for the life has gone right out of us.*

*At times like these silence can feel unbearable. Yet in this silent place we allow these words of your prophet Jeremiah, to call us to remember something You've been teaching us all along our journey:*

*“Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness.” (say 2x)*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- Let “remembering” be a prayer practice for you today. What memories arise that built your trust in God and can speak to you when what you see or news you have received say otherwise?
- Read Matthew 27:57-60. Walk through the Scripture as though you are Joseph of Arimathea. Envision yourself asking Pilate for Jesus' body, getting permission, taking the body, wrapping & laying it in your own tomb, rolling a stone in front of it, and walking away. Reflect on interacting with the Scripture in this way.
- How could silence possibly be a gift? Now recall a time when God seemed silent. What is/was God's invitation through your time of silence? Allow some space for silence in your life today as a way of letting go and trusting God's heart.

Easter Sunday

### **Imagine**

God's heart is infinitely better than we could ever imagine. Therefore, where our journey is heading is infinitely better than what we could ever imagine.

Close your eyes and bring to your mind's eye the place where your hope and journey has ended. Notice the surroundings and what you are doing. Think back to the beginning of your journey until now and remember how Jesus was with you...in your place of stopping, in the desert & wilderness, when others affirmed you and when others betrayed you. Now you can no longer see the One who journeyed with you. What does this stir in you?

Now become aware of someone approaching you, meeting you in this place. He says something to you that first brings a look of confusion then joy spreads over your face! What did He say? What stirs in you now?

Allow the scene to unfold for a few moments and then close with this prayer.

### **Pray**

*God, there are times that we cannot help but feel abandoned by You. It seems You have left us, turned Your back, no longer care about our pain or else You're powerless. And yet, just as Mary Magdalene discovered when she went to Your tomb on that dark third day, the very place where dead hope lies, there You are!*

*Oh how we need this story of Jesus being raised from the dead, of hope returning!  
We need to be reminded that death is not the end of our story, whether it is someone we dearly love or a dream we have dearly held onto. We can trust that You will meet us in the very place of our pain and somehow, someday we will experience the joy of resurrection.*

*We pause in silence now to allow You to meet us in the place of our pain and speak tender life-giving, perhaps even powerful life-raising, words to us.*

*(20 seconds or ~ of silence)*

*Amen.*

### **Reflect**

- Let a symbol of resurrection speak to you today, whether from the Biblical story or from the created world. You might draw, paint, or sculpt this image. How might it become a prayerful reminder of hope for you and others?
- “We are witnesses of everything he did...” said Peter in Acts 10:39. As an individual or with a group, recount what you have witnessed God doing in your life, and in the life of your group/church/community/world.
- Sufferings and celebrations, death and resurrection, are part of everyone's journey with and toward the heart of God but not all recognize God in the midst of it. Peter and the disciples recognized the risen Jesus in eating and drinking with him, how have you recognized God's presence along your journey? How might you honor the Heart of Love that tenderly and powerfully holds every part of the journey, from beginning to end?