

St John's Episcopal Church

Ross, CA



Meditations for Families

Lent 2017

A few ways to celebrate Lent as a family

- This booklet offers a meditation, reading, questions and a family challenge for each week in Lent. Any time your family is together, you can read and pray together. It's perfect for family dinner or even the drive to a Saturday soccer game.
- Talk together about what you as individuals might like to do to mark Lent. The goal of Lent isn't to deprive yourself of something or to be sad – it's to make more space for God in your life. What are ways that you can make more space? Is there something you would like to add to your life – a new habit, a daily act of kindness? Is there something you would like to take away, something you'd like to give up in order to get closer to God? Talk together as a family about what you might like to do and why. If your children are too young to take something on themselves, tell them about your own Lent practices.
- With teens and tweens, consider participating in Lent Madness (<http://www.lentmadness.org>) a March Madness (college basketball) style bracket that offers the chance for exploration in faith and good old-fashioned competition.
- Feel free to reach out to our clergy and staff if you'd to talk more about how to bring your children up in faith that is open-minded and joyful.

An Invitation to a Family Celebration of Lent

By Ben Irwin, www.growchristians.org

We're trying to invite our kids to experience the church calendar as an alternate lived reality, as a way of moving and ordering our lives differently from the world around us. To be fair, as parents we're only just discovering this alternate reality for ourselves, since neither my wife or I grew up in a liturgical tradition...

It's probably fairer to say that we're inviting our kids to go on this journey of discovery with us. Which sounds great... until we come to Lent.

I don't quite know what to do with Lent for my kids.

Advent is a relatively easy season for us to walk through as a family. There are candles to light (and, if you're my one-year-old son, to immediately blow out)...

But Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a sobering reminder of our inevitable death.

The sight of ashes on my daughter's unwrinkled forehead—the thought of telling her, in word and through ritual, that she is destined for the grave—it seems almost cruel.

I know... it is more cruel to pretend all is well with the world when all is most certainly not. But try locking eyes with an ebullient five-year-old and telling her “to dust you shall return.”

Surely an observance as solemn as Lent isn't the way to keep our kids in the church. It runs counter to almost everything people say churches must do to attract and retain youth. Keep it fun! Keep them entertained! Keep it relevant!

But maybe the conventional wisdom isn't so wise after all. A few years ago, the [Fuller Youth Institute](#) shared the findings of a six-year study on what makes faith “stick” as children transition to adulthood. Two findings in particular jumped out at me:

1. Churches and families overestimate how prepared their young people are to face the struggles that come with adulthood.

Maybe it's because we haven't invited them to walk through the darker valleys with us. Maybe our fear of talking with our kids about the hard things of our faith—death, denial, sacrifice—is misplaced. Maybe that's what they really need us to share with them.

2. More than anything else, the durability of faith is determined by the degree to which young people are made to feel an integral part of an intergenerational community.

It's not the youth group. It's not the programming. All that stuff is great, but it's not what makes faith stick. What makes it durable is inviting a child to share the journey with you.

To walk through the church calendar together.

To experience all the seasons of faith—Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter—together.

To talk about the hard things together.

To discover what it means to deny ourselves, to lay down our lives for one another—together.

Even to face our inevitable death, together.

This Lent, we'll talk about the hard things as a family. We'll consider our mortality, our frailty, our vulnerability. We will lean into the darkness rather than run from it.

Because the painful yet glorious truth that Jesus demonstrated for us is this: the only path to resurrection runs through the grave.

Lent is a time to introduce our kids to the reality of redemption: "Not yet... but." Like Advent, it's a time for us to linger over the brokenness of our world and ourselves, so that we might fully experience together how the rest of the story—the triumph of Jesus—really does change everything.

He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins,

for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us.

And do not bring us to the time of trial.”

Before you read the bible passage, ask your kids what they think about prayer.

How do they pray? Why do they pray? What does it mean to them when they pray?

Complete this sentence: Prayer is _____.

Discussion Questions:

Why do we pray together in worship?

Why do we say the Lord's Prayer each week?

Why do we call it the Lord's Prayer?

Are there other ways to pray?

Do you pray? When? How?

How can God hear all of our prayers at once?

How come God doesn't answer my prayers?

What if two people pray for opposite outcomes?

This week, take time to pray for all the people around you.

Specifically, think of one someone you need to pray for this week.

- If you'd like an easy task, pray for someone in your family or one of your friends you like a lot.
- If you'd like a slightly difficult challenge, pray for someone you don't like for whatever reason, maybe even an enemy. And instead of praying "Lord, them" Pray "Lord, give them what they need and I hope they're happy."

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Before you read the Bible passage ask your kids what they know about doubt. What does it mean? You can explain that doubt was what they feel when they don't believe what is being told to them.

Ask your kids what they know about faith. What does it mean? You can explain that faith is what they feel when they do believe what is being told to them even though they don't have any proof.

Some questions for after the reading:

Jesus met the disciples while they were still sad about his death. What was the purpose of Jesus' returning to them?

What did Jesus hope to accomplish?

Why were the disciples in need of peace that day?

The blessing that Jesus offered the disciples—"Peace be with you"—is something we hear every Sunday during worship. When someone says "Peace be with you," what does it mean to you?

When you say "Peace be with you", how much do you mean what you say?

If you knew for sure that a person offering these words to you really meant them, how would you feel?

Who can you think of who could use a heartfelt greeting and wish for peace?

When do you struggle to find peace in your own life? How might prayer help at those times?

This week think and pray about the people in your life that need peace. How can you share peace with them? Maybe make sure they get an extra big hug? Can you write them a note or share your ice cream?

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

Before the reading: Talk to your kids about choices. Say something like: Every day we make choices about things we are going to do. Sometimes we choose to do really good, fun things: Like ride our bike, or play nicely with our brothers or sisters. We do what our parents tell us to do. We say “please” and “thank you.” We get up and go to bed when we are told to do so.

But, we don't ALWAYS do everything that is right... Do we? Sometimes... sometimes (not often, maybe) we do things that are wrong. Not a mistake, like “Oops, I spilled my milk.” Or “Uh, oh, I forgot to feed the dog.” But something really, really wrong that we decide to do on purpose... even when we KNOW that we aren't supposed to.

In the Bible there is a story of a man named Peter. Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. He followed Jesus every day. He cared about Jesus very much. He thought he was Jesus' best follower. Jesus told Peter that on that very night he would deny even knowing Jesus three different times. And that he would do all of this before the rooster crowed the next morning.

That night Jesus was arrested. Afterwards someone asked Peter if he knew Jesus. Peter told the person “No.” He was asked again and again. All three times Peter said that he didn't know Jesus. All of a sudden the rooster crowed and Peter remembered what Jesus had told him. Peter cried.

Ask: Why do you think Peter cried when he heard the rooster crow?

But, happily, the story doesn't end there! Jesus died and was buried. But on the third day He rose from the dead! After that He visited with His disciples. Today's story is about the first time he sees Peter.

After the reading: Think back. How many times did Peter tell the person that he didn't know Jesus? (*Three*) And how many times did Jesus ask Peter if he loved Him? (*Three*)

We know that if Jesus loves Peter even though he did something that wrong, Jesus will always love us and ask us to do good things.

What is something good we can do this week? Are there "sheep" we can feed and care for this week?

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

Before the reading:

Ask your child(ren) can remember a time when they were very little, and they got lost. Perhaps lost in a grocery store, maybe lost in a mall, or wandered away at a campsite, for example.

If they do not remember anything, you could share a story of your own (either as the lost one or as the parent of a lost one).

Then ask the children to try to imagine what it might feel like to be lost because you had chosen to run away and now you are sorry you did. Tell the children that today's story has to do with people who were lost and were looking for a way to come back.

After the reading:

Go back to the beginning of the reading and remind your kids that Jesus was talking in public and that the Pharisees saw him talking with troublemakers and sinners.

Ask:

If Jesus were speaking at your school today, who are people that cause trouble at school who might be there to hear Jesus?

Who would be the stuck-up people that would ask: what are THESE people doing here?

So, if Jesus were telling this story at your school, what do you think he would tell about instead of sheep?

Can you help Jesus by telling his story for your school?

What might be lost?

Encourage the children to paraphrase the story, setting it at their school, today.

How can you and your children work this week to make the lost feel found?
What can you do as a family to make a safe space for their friends?

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Before the reading:

Ask your kids about some of the rules they deal with every day. Classroom rules, family rules, sports rules, etc.

Set the scene by telling your kids that wherever Jesus went, people gathered. Some wanted healing. Some came to hear his stories. Others were curious about this amazing man who said old things in a new way and seemed to speak with a quiet certainty that indicated he knew what he was talking about. Others were suspicious of Jesus. They wanted to see whether Jesus really upheld the laws of the religion of that day or whether he was breaking them.

After the Reading, ask:

Why do you think this is called "The Great Commandment"?

What do you think it means to love God? How can we do this?

What do you think it means to love your neighbor?

Who are our neighbors? (other than the people who live next door... who else?)

What are the ways that we show love to our neighbors?

What are ways we use to avoid loving our neighbors?

What do you think it means to love others as ourselves?

If we don't love ourselves, can we love others?

Other Ways to Connect to God this Lent

Celebrate Lent and Easter with Children and Youth

- Help a family in need this Easter! We are putting together Easter Baskets of household goods and Easter meal ingredients for homeless families and housebound seniors. Please email ginger@stjohnsross.org to participate by adopting a family, assembling baskets, or making deliveries.
- Join us for our **Pajama Sunday Potluck** after the 10am service on Sunday, April 23 – the Sunday after Easter. Wear your PJs to church and bring a dish to share! There will be a special project for children to help them understand and experience the meaning of the Easter season.

Lent Classes for Adults

- **Daily Meditation and Prayer:** Interested in starting a daily practice of prayer or meditation? Or looking to infuse your daily prayer with some new energy? Join us as we explore how to pray in a way that is sustainable and joyful. **Sunday, March 12, 11:30am-12:30pm** in the Fireside Room.
- **Christ and Culture:** At a time when the world around us seems to be going crazy, how are Christians called to respond? Do we practice acceptance? Withdraw and take care of ourselves? Resist and oppose? Join us for a discussion **on Sundays in Lent** (with the exception of Sunday, March 12) in the Fireside Room from 11:30-12:30am. Each class is designed to stand alone, so no need to attend every meeting in order to participate.
- **Demons in the Desert: A contemplative Lenten Sojourn** Join us for this three-week Lenten Series, taught by the Rev. Dr. Vincent Pizzuto, Professor of New Testament at the University of San Francisco, Vicar of St. Columba's Inverness and Vicar at New Skellig Celtic Christian Community. The course will meet on March 15, 22, and 29 from 6:30-8pm in the Youth Room.