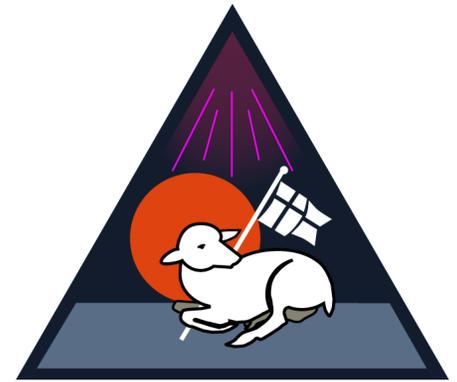


NLCF Lent 2023 - *40 Days with Jesus!*

Introduction

Lent was started as a way for new believers to become enmeshed in the life and way of Jesus and the Church, leading up to their baptism on Easter Sunday. The Church continues this tradition today as a way for all believers to engage and orient themselves around Christ. While many may see Lent as a time for removing something from their daily life (a type of food, or habit for example) this is also a time for filling: a season to fill ourselves with the love and passion of Jesus Christ.



40 DAYS WITH JESUS
Lenten meditations on the life of Christ

This year at NLCF we are offering 40 Days with Jesus - weekly prayer, reading, and meditation themes to focus on as we move with intention towards Easter and the resurrection.

Feel free to engage as deeply as you're able.

(Our recommendation? Spend 5 min in silence before you begin. You can meditate daily, or throughout the week. If you're just starting out, try 3 days a week, 15-20 min at a time. If you're up for a challenge, try 5-6 days, 30 min at a time!)

Week 1 2/26 - 3/4 - Identity and temptation

Read: Matthew 3:1-4:17; Luke 4:1-13

Meditate: Jesus is baptized in the Jordan, and even before he has performed a single miracle, God the Father avows His Love for his son. Jesus' identity is already concrete, but he must face what all humans face – temptations, attacks on our identity. He is tempted through his Appetites, Affirmations, and Ambition. Appetites are the things we hunger and long for. Can we rely and trust that God has our best interest at heart? Or will we take what we *think* we need without a second thought? The second way Jesus, and we, are tempted is through desiring the affirmations of others. Jesus has already been called 'beloved' by the Father - so have we! Satan wants Jesus to try and prove his identity through public spectacle. Won't others like you if you do **this**? The final way of temptation is ambition - what are the things **we** want to accomplish? Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world - isn't that what Jesus wants? But the way of Satan is not the way of God. Jesus, and we, must turn against the ways of evil even if we think they could do good.

Reflect: What are some of our most common temptations? Can you categorize them through Appetite, Affirmation, and Ambition? Take some time to confess these places to God right now.

Pray: God, thank you for this day and week you have given. As we long to follow Jesus in his Way, help us to leave behind our appetites, our need for affirmation, and our ambition and remember that first and

foremost we are called “Beloved.” Our identity rests solely in you. Help us see and resist Satan’s attacks on our vulnerable hearts, and help us to live in gratitude for the things you have given them. Let us list some of those things now: _____. May your word be written on our hearts so that we may continue to walk in your Way and resist evil. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, in this place as it is in Heaven, amen.

Week 2 3/5 - 3/11 Community

Read: Matthew 4:18-25; Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-17; Luke 5:1-11, 27-32; John 1:35-51

Meditate: Jesus begins his ministry with a message: “Turn and believe for the Kingdom has come near!” (Mark 1:15) He also begins to call to himself those called ‘disciples.’ Learners. Seekers. Eventually in John 15 - Friends. The Kingdom of Heaven is a community. Jesus desires that people would not only see and hear the things he says and does, but they would be able to participate in it. This is one of the connecting threads through all of scripture - God wants to be with, and serve with, His people! This desire awakens in us a desire to be with and draw near to Jesus, to sit at his feet, to be taught, challenged, stirred, healed, and ultimately sent out to engage in the same kind of ministry with Jesus and the Christian community we find ourselves in.

Reflect: who are the people around you and what are their gifts? Spend time thanking God for their presence in your life. What are the ways in which you can find yourself at the feet of Jesus? How can you be a lifelong disciple? Jesus is continually calling us to him, as he called the first disciples. How will you respond?

Pray: God we are grateful that you are not a ‘lone wolf’ individual. We are thankful that you desire to be with, equip, and serve aside us as followers of your Way, as citizens of the Kingdom. Help us to encourage one another in the faith that we may always be ready when you call. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, in this place as it is in Heaven, amen.

Week 3 3/12 - 3/18 - The tenets of God’s Kingdom

Read: Matthew 5-7

Meditate: Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” is one of the most famous and engaging teachings we see in the Gospels. Some have likened it to being the ‘constitution’ of His Kingdom. As we engage with these words, read through the lens of God’s love... At first what may appear ‘upside down’ to us is really Jesus revealing to us how broken the world truly is - but also how loving our God is. In this passage, God’s love for folks in vulnerable states, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the afflicted, truly shines. His desire for the ‘lowly and humble’ to inherit the Kingdom is evident. Not only that, but his Kingdom, and his peaceable way is accessible to all who seek it.

Reflect: What parts of the passage are refreshing to you? What parts are a challenge? Which parts do you wish to engage with Jesus more on? What do you think it was like for the people who first heard these words?

Pray: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* Matt 6:9-13

Week 4 3/19 - 3/25 - Difficulty and the “God who weeps”

Read: John 11:1-44

Meditate: Pain, grief, suffering - we are not immune to these things as human beings. And neither is Jesus. Waiting itself can be painful as well. This world is hard, sharp, and difficult. We are fragile, finite beings with limits. Trusting in the midst of pain can feel like running a marathon on little training. We may slog it out, but it's not pretty. What we are presented with in the story of Lazarus is a microscopic view on people in the midst of waiting and grief. Perhaps this is familiar to you. Confusion, frustration, anger, denial, acceptance. We see this in detail, but also see something rather extraordinary - Jesus, the full representation of God on earth (Col 1:15-20) - weeping in response to the death of his friend. God weeps with us, for us, over us. There is much brokenness, but we also serve a God who is aware of what we go through - and is working on reconciling all things together again. Death is an enemy, and He will reign until it has been destroyed. (1 Cor 15:25-26). Jesus' weeping, though he knows he will raise Lazarus, is a sign to us - a reminder of the shape of God's heart. He sees us, knows us, and is present with us, even in the waiting and the grief.

Reflect: What are you mourning today? What bit of grief and sadness can you share with the God Who Weeps? How might the tenderness of Jesus bring you comfort today? What might we grieve *with* Jesus?

Pray: Gracious, eternal one. You are Holy and set apart - yet you willingly dwell with us, that we might be aware of your presence and comforted in the midst of strife. We pray for the ways in which we are wounded and grieving, even in this season. We also pray for those around us who are in a season of loss, sadness, waiting, or grieving as well. May your peace and wholeness sit with them and nurture them. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, in this place as it is in Heaven, amen.

Week 5 3/26 - 4/1 - Service and Generosity

Read: John 13:1-20; John 14:5-14

Meditate: What kind of King washes feet? What kind of leader would do that? Performing the tasks of a servant was no place for a rabbi of Jesus' standing. The disciples struggled with understanding what they were seeing, experiencing. But as we've seen, Jesus made a point of flipping our expectations upside down. Rather than a stoic and cold leader, we see a warm, loving man who is willing to be a servant, and ultimately be seen as a criminal in order to accomplish his loving work of salvation and mercy. Had the disciples deserved Christ's love, displayed in such a manner? Of course not. That's not the point. Jesus loves because he loves to love. He loves his creation, his people. Philip asks Jesus to 'show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus replies 'anyone who sees me has seen the Father.' God's love, for all to see, when a teacher washes his friend's feet.

Reflect: What would your thoughts and feelings be as Jesus knelt to wash your feet? Imagine him doing so now. Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth serving you as a friend and his beloved, revealing the ultimate truth of God - that he desires his eternal love to be poured out on everyone, in tenderness and kindness.

Pray: Holy Father, you who break our expectations of love and kindness, we thank you for the example of your Son and representative, Jesus. You set the boundaries of the earth in its place, and yet you have tenderness of a caretaker, guiding our dirty feet towards cleansing water. As you have shown us this example of love, you also call us to extend this example of love to those around us. Show us whose feet we should 'wash' Lord as we seek to follow you and serve our neighbors and friends. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, in this place as it is in Heaven, amen.

Week 6 4/2 - 4/8 - 24/7 Prayer - Jesus' Trial & Crucifixion

Read: Matthew 26:36-28:20; Mark 14:32-16:19; Luke 22:39-24:50;

Meditate: It's all come to this. The coronation ceremony of the King. Arrested, tried, convicted, and executed as a criminal by the state. Given a robe, crown, and sceptre. Spat upon, beaten, bruised, whipped, mocked. His throne? A shame-filled tool of the Empire to keep 'peace' and 'order.' Yet there he is, raised and lifted up, just as he quoted the prophet Daniel when he told the authorities, "From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (Matt 26:64; Dan 7:13) The bridge between heaven & earth, God & humanity, the Way, the Truth, and the Live, pouring His blood out on the Judean dirt. What was it that brought Him here to this awful, doomed place? What was it that led Him to willingly be lead to such a torturous and merciless execution? The eternal love that He shared with the Father and Spirit since before time began. The eternal relationship that He invites us to participate in. The rescue of His people from all oppression and disordered living. This is the ultimate love of the Eternal God.

Reflect: Keep silence. Watch. Wait. Gaze upon the passover lamb. Sit in the tension of "Good Friday."

Pray: Creator God, we give thanks this day for the willing passion [suffering] of your Son, Jesus the Christ. We place ourselves before the throne at once a dark and terrible day, and yet one that freed us from condemnation. Jesus, we look upon you 'seated' upon the crooked 'throne,' mourning the cost and measure of your ultimate love. Give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to love, and hands to do. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, in this place as it is in Heaven, amen.

Important Dates

Ash Wednesday - Feb 22 6p 1521 S Main

Worship Night - March 17 1521 S Main

Palm Sunday - April 2

24-7 prayer week - April 2 - 8

Good Friday Service - April 7 6p 1521 S Main

Easter Sunday - April 9 – 1030a Squires Colonial Hall