

Good Dirt

Family Devotions
for Lent & Holy Week



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Growing Instructions

Flip over a package of seeds. What will you find on the back? Growing instructions. Intimate details about soil preparation, water and sun requirements, spacing and even disease control. We easily know more than we could ever use, and maybe ever want to know about how to care for the plant that will become of our seed.

Our souls need the same care. How do we place our souls in the transforming hands of God? How can we work with God to “create in me a clean heart?” How can we raise our children with healthy souls that long for God and not the sick souls we so often see on the TV news? Our culture is bursting with ideas for “watering” the human soul. Our cultural solutions haven’t left the human soul healthy. Health is not in what we do, it’s in who we are.

Welcome to your family garden. God has given you both the seed of your own soul, and the seeds of the little souls that live in your house and leave their gum on the table. Our job is to Till, Plant, Water, and Weed. Doing what we can to make our family soil rich in the love of God.

In the same way that gardens need constant care, so do souls, both little and big ones. The Daily Office is a great tool for continuous garden work. Work in the garden sometime in the morning. Again at noon, once more at dinner, and finally wrap the day up with one more pass. For some families this means a short time at breakfast before everyone races off to their days. Parents can work in their garden at lunch, and then bring everyone back together at dinner, and again everyone at bedtime.

Daily Gardening Rhythms

Till: Greet the day with prayer. “Good Morning Master Gardener. We will need your help today. And thanks for the rain.” Perhaps praying together at the breakfast table works, or snuggled together in bed before the day begins.

Plant: Scripture. The good seed of God is his Word. There is no better for the little and big souls in families. Read it aloud. Have your newest family reader read, or your oldest, and boldest. What an honor to speak these words of life. If everyone is willing, read it twice. Read it slow. Let it seep in—let it leach the life giving vitamins and minerals into the family. Let it feed these souls. Again, this could happen at the breakfast table—ideally everyone has some of the good food of God’s word before they embark on their day.

Water: Reflection. Got to have water. Water not only hydrates, but it carries vitamins and

minerals to where they are needed. Perhaps at noon, mom and dad with any little ones that aren't at school will use the reflection questions to think about. Reflections, like water, are carriers: they carry the truths of scriptures straight to the center of the heart where they can do the most good. If not all of the family was able to reflect, reread the scripture and reflect at dinner.

Weed: Examine. If weeds are not pulled in a garden they will choke out all life. That is the harsh truth of gardens and people. Even toddlers can examine their days. They know very well when they have obeyed and when they have not. From the first time they declare their will and scream, "Mine!" they can be gently lead into the life giving practice of examine. Just before bedtime is the perfect time to examine the day, to ask the questions: what in my day today was life giving, what was not? How did I give light to others today, or not?

Suggestions for Daily Garden Care: (Daily Office)

Rhythm #1:

AM (Breakfast): Till and Plant
Noon: Water
PM (Dinner): Plant and Water
Bedtime: Weed

Rhythm #2:

AM (Breakfast) Till
Noon: Plant
PM (Dinner): Plant, Water
Bedtime: Weed

Rhythm #3:

AM (Breakfast): Till
Noon: Plant, Water
PM (Dinner): Plant, Water
Bedtime: Weed

There are many different combinations to be used for Daily Garden Care. At some point between waking up and going to bed, be sure to Till, Plant, Water, and Weed, as a family. These are meant to be adaptable for families on the go, or at home. As flexible as this can be, it is very helpful to establish a rhythm, the same time to do the same thing day after day. Daily rhythms evoke a sense of security. Rhythms give families a knowing expectation of what is to come, they set the tone of the day.

And What about the Littlest People?

This is a family rhythm, and because families can range in ages, we've aimed at the middle. Every aspect—Till, Plant, Water and Weed—can be “rounded” up or down. “Rounding” up is rarely a problem, but what about the littlest members of our family? How does this nurture the preschool people?

These little interactive sponges have all senses on *go!* The real value of ritual, which involves so many of the senses, is spent on the little ones. Each night during Advent as the candles are lit, their minds are drinking in that ‘light dispels darkness’ and ‘the One who is celebrated is the light.’ The regularity of ritual teaches far more than wordy explanations. The Seasonal Fun section is the main teaching tool for small children. In living the seasons and reading the scriptures year after year, an essential foundation is being built on the Rock. They are listening when the scriptures are being read. Furthermore, they understand far more than we realize. It is not that we, the knowing adults, have to introduce them to God. They very recently were knitted together in their mother’s womb. They know the Knitter. However, at their developmental stage they lack the language to express what they know. It is, nevertheless, up to us, their parents, to teach them the language, and to teach them what a relationship with God looks like on this earth.

Now, set your rhythm and work that soil. ✨



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Lent
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Introduction to Lent

Lent is the season of the divine paradox. We must die to live. While the previous seasons of the church year burst with life, Lent brings us firmly to our deaths. Lent teaches us that the path of wholeness comes through sacrifice. Jesus himself said that we must die to live. Nature echoes this paradox. Seeds must die to live. Stars die to birth galaxies. It is the way of creation, and we are created. If we live in a constant state of indulgence we will never live a whole life. When we deny ourselves, die to our wants and needs, wholeness seeps into us and we live. Lent is our salvation from the superfluous.

The color for Lent is purple, a color for the penitent. Lent is the season for confessing our sin and our inability to control our own lives. Lent is forty days long; it begins on Ash Wednesday and ends during Holy Week. Lent has its roots in the forty days of Noah on the ark, the forty years of Israel in the desert, Jonah's forty days of penance for Nineveh, and for Jesus' forty days of fasting in the desert.

Practicing Lent with children

It seems Christmastide and Advent, with all their indulgences, are seasons custom made for children, but what about Lent? What do we do with children and death? Aren't we to teach them to live? Herein lies the paradox. It is our job to teach them to live, but they must learn to die to themselves in order really to live. They must learn to die to having their own way, and they must learn to give what they have in order to receive what God has for them. We are to teach them to love themselves, but if we stop there maturation will never come. The next step is to teach them to give up their lives. However, we cannot hope for that change in our children until we, their parents and teachers, embrace it ourselves. We teach them to die, by dying ourselves.

At this writing I am at my Grandfather's house. I am helping take care of him in his last days, which are only a few. I remember my Aunt Nita, when she was on her death bed, saying that she didn't know how to die—she had never done it before. And I watch my Grandfather struggle with knowing the same. How do we die? When does our innate striving for life cease, and we let the wholeness come to us? We look to Jesus, who not only taught us how to die by dying on the cross, but died to his will every day of his life. He practiced dying daily. He made a way for it.

And so we also make a way for death. We clear the path, clean the space, and set our houses in order. That is what we do during Lent, as we participate in the three disciplines of prayer,

fasting and giving. Together these disciplines do what we cannot do. They clear the path, clean the space and set our houses in order so that God can bring death and then wholeness. What in you needs to die?

With all this death talk we may think we must walk around with sour looks on our faces. Not us, the people of God—the paradox kicks in, and we are joyful. Love makes Lent joyful. What we do, we do out of love for God and for neighbor. As a family we struggle together, and that draws us into one another, and there is joy in that. Self-denial makes our families richer instead of poorer. Can't you see it now: the Kingdom of God stands on its head in defiance to a world that says, "Get all you can and share with no one." Lent is the chance to collectively say, "We give all we can and share with everyone."

Family Fun for Lent:

Since Lent is such a penitent season it is important to remember and to tell our children that God doesn't need us to do these things. He loves us just the same. We need to do these things. We are in need, not God.

Don't try to do everything! Do as you can, not as you can't. Pick a few and be consistent.

- » **Bury the Alleluia Banner:** If you still have your Alleluia banner up from Epiphany or your Epiphany stars, now is the time to put them away. We bury our banner, so we can dig it up again at Easter. The kids hide it somewhere in the house where only they know.
- » **The Big Three: Prayer, Fasting, Giving**

Prayer is for the good of our spirit.

- Family Altar or Prayer Corner: Cover a small table with a beautiful table cloth, decorate with candles, a cross, or a family Bible, maybe a small shallow box with sand in it, where children can draw their prayers to God, maybe a family prayer journal. Invite family members to visit the altar at least once a day during Lent.
- Prayer Box: Take a 3x5 index card box and write prayers from the Bible, or from saints, or beautiful pieces of poetry on the card and place them in the box. Read one each evening before bed, or at the dinner table.

Fasting is for the good of our bodies.

- Traditionally many folks fast meat on Fridays and they will also choose some other vice to give up for 40 days. If this works for you and your people, go for it.
- Others I know have fasted eating out for 40 days, still others have fasted sugar, or chocolate, soda.
- For children giving up nutritional food is not an option, but giving up TV, or video games, or texting is.
- Fasting is not popular in our culture. To deny myself something I want will sound strange to others, but it is imminently important that we and our children learn to

tell our bodies, “No.” Letting our bodies run our lives will destroy us, no question about it.

- Fasting is directly related to prayer. We will need strength beyond ourselves to die to our wills. The will is loud, and irritating; only the peace of God can quiet it.

Giving is for the good of others.

- Giving begins right where we are. We look to our families and see where we take instead of give. We make the effort to overcome our natural pet peeves. We do something nice for someone who irritates us.
 - We choose to eat simple meals, or to fast junk food, and send the extra grocery money to someone else. There are many great organizations that truly give life to others. Lifewater International, for example, is dedicated to helping people get the freshwater they need to live. They have a guide to practicing Lent as a way of caring for the poor. <http://www.lifewater.org/significantsacrifice>
 - We fast our favorite TV show and instead pack the family up and visit the local nursing home.
 - We give up always having to talk about ourselves and give the gift of listening.
- » **Make a poster of the Big Three.** Choose, as a family, which you would like to do and put them on the poster as a reminder.
- » **Plant a Seed:** Take a clear cup and plant a seed next to the side, so that you can see the seed grow roots and change. Invite children to draw a picture of it daily, as it changes. Encourage them to do the watering. Remind them that we also change as we are watered with prayer, fasting, and giving.
- » **Order a Butterfly Kit:** Carolina Biological Supply Company has butterfly kits. If you have the means to do so, order one. Invite all the family members to observe the stages of change, when the butterfly emerges create a special ceremony for releasing.
- » **Sabbath:** Many traditions honor a reprieve from fasting on the Sabbath. The thinking is that there should be nothing, but feasting on the day that our Lord raised from the dead. Sabbath is a celebration day to focus on life and not death, no matter the season. Not all traditions break their fasts on the Sabbath. Our recommendation is that either is beneficial. You can do what your local church does, or have a family discussion and decision. What is not beneficial is to focus on breaking the fast, so that when the Sabbath arrives- the obsession has pushed into glutton, lust, greed- in short that we become worse off than when we started. Eating a box of Twinkies on the Sabbath, because we are fasting desert the rest of the week, is not celebration.
- » **Saint Patrick’s Day (March 17):** Take a break from Purple and color everything green.
- Purchase a children’s book about St. Patrick and read it.
 - Make a poster of the shamrock, and write Father, Son and Holy Spirit on it.
 - Play Celtic music and learn (or pretend) to dance a jig.

About the readings:

During Lent we are going to read straight through the first twelve chapters of the book of John. In such a somber period, John's gospel is full of light—the light of the glory of Jesus. More than any other gospel, John bursts into poetry and praise. His writing is crammed with excitement as he helps us see Jesus as the Son of God. But he also doesn't shy away from the darkness. Early on, John tells us that the darkness doesn't want anything to do with the light, and flees from it so it won't be exposed.

As we read John together during this season, it is a good time to ask ourselves questions: what keeps us from drawing close to Jesus? Where do we prefer to keep to our own way? It's also a good time, amidst all the "tough stuff," to pause and celebrate that Jesus is God's answer to all of our fears and weaknesses. The Kingdom of God is here, in our midst—because He is in our midst! "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!"

Traditionally, churches do not use the word "Alleluia" during Lent. Reading John grows in our hearts a pent-up joy so that when Easter comes, "Alleluia" bursts from our lips! ✨

✠ *Week of Ash Wednesday*

Ash Wednesday

Seasonal Fun:

On Ash Wednesday we remember that dust is where we began and dust is where we will return. Again, it is totally against our cultural norms to reject the perpetual quest for eternal youth. Ash Wednesday is a day to take a good honest look at ourselves, and confess how we have moved away from God.

- » Practice confession. There is something powerful in saying our sins out loud. Saying them out loud helps us to own them. And even more powerful is to hear our pronouncement of forgiveness aloud. Often when we struggle to embrace the forgiveness of God, an oral pronouncement from a trusted friend or clergy will be all the help we need. Furthermore teaching our children to look back as far as they can into their lives and think where they have not obeyed God, or where they have hurt someone else is both a holy habit of humility and grace.
- » Prepare for Ash Wednesday by spring cleaning the house. From top to bottom and all accessory buildings clean, clean, clean. Collect goods that are not used, or needed, or fit and cart them over to the Salvation Army, Goodwill, or some other charitable donation location.
- » Many churches hold special services for Ash Wednesday, in the morning or evening. During this service, traditionally ashes are applied to believer's foreheads as a symbol of repentance. If your church does, ask how your younger children can participate. If your church does not offer such a service, consider visiting another denomination that does.

Till:

God, you made us, and you know—we're made from dust, we return to dust. Thank you for being compassionate to us in our weakness, and accepting us in Jesus.

Plant:

Luke 18:9-14 (MSG)

He told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

"Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'"

Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

Additional readings for Ash Wednesday:

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20–6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Water:

- » **Play it:** encourage children to act out the parable Jesus tells in today's reading. This will help them visualize what Jesus is teaching.
- » **Enter it:** In this story, there are two men: one whose prayer focuses on how good he is, and one who just asks God for forgiveness. Jesus says that the second man, who asked for mercy, was made right with God, not the other. Why do you think that is?
- » **Apply it:** God forgives us when we confess our sins. (Read 1 John 1:9). What would it look like today if you trusted God and admitted when you are wrong, instead of hiding mistakes?

Weed:

- » Lead your family in a time of confession at the end of the day. Where did you fall short of loving God and loving others? Be sure to thank God for his forgiveness.
- » What was it like today, admitting mistakes instead of hiding them? How was it hard? How did it change your attitude?

Thursday

Till:

Jesus, you are the Lamb of God—you take all our sins away! You are the one we need, the Son of God. Thank you for giving us a fresh start with God.

Plant:

John 1:29-34 (MSG)

The very next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and yelled out, "Here he is, God's Passover Lamb! He forgives the sins of the world! This is the man I've been talking about, 'the One who comes after me but is really ahead of me.' I knew nothing about who he was—only this: that my task has been to get Israel ready to recognize him as the God-Revealer. That is why I came here baptizing with water, giving you a good bath and scrubbing sins from your life so you can get a fresh start with God."

John clinched his witness with this: "I watched the Spirit, like a dove flying down out of the sky, making himself at home in him. I repeat, I know nothing about him except this: The One who authorized me to baptize with water told me, 'The One on whom you see the Spirit come down and stay, this One will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' That's exactly what I saw happen, and I'm telling you, there's no question about it: This is the Son of God."

Water:

- » **Play it:** In today's reading, John the Baptizer points out Jesus as the one who will scrub away all our sins. Using dry-erase or wet-erase markers, have kids write on transparencies or a plastic object some of the things they struggle with (perhaps some of what they confessed earlier). (Be sure to test the object ahead of time to make sure it will wipe clean!) Then have kids dip the object in soapy water and wash away the words they wrote.
- » **Apply it:** Today, when you realize you have made a mistake or done something wrong, imagine Jesus washing that sin right away, giving you a clean start with God.

Weed:

- » How did it feel to know that Jesus washes away all your mistakes and sins?
- » How do you feel about God, knowing that he forgives you?

Friday

Till:

Jesus, we want to see what life with you is really like. Thank you for inviting us to be your students. Help us lay down anything that keeps us from following you.

Plant:

John 1:35-42 (MSG)

The next day John was back at his post with two disciples, who were watching. He looked up, saw Jesus walking nearby, and said, "Here he is, God's Passover Lamb."

The two disciples heard him and went after Jesus. Jesus looked over his shoulder and said to them, "What are you after?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

He replied, "Come along and see for yourself."

They came, saw where he was living, and ended up staying with him for the day. It was late afternoon when this happened.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard John's witness and followed Jesus. The first thing he did after finding where Jesus lived was find his own brother, Simon, telling him, "We've found the Messiah" (that is, "Christ"). He immediately led him to Jesus.

Jesus took one look up and said, "You're John's son, Simon? From now on your name is Cephas" (or Peter, which means "Rock").

Water:

- » **Enter it:** In today's reading, Jesus invites some disciples to "come and see" what life with him is like. We learn to be like Jesus by being with him. Name some things you have learned how to do by being with mom or dad. How did it feel to learn from them?
- » **Apply it:** what are some things that keep you from wanting to learn from Jesus? How could you stay with Him today?

Weed:

- » When did you "come and see" with Jesus today?
- » Did you learn anything from Him today?

Saturday

Till:

Jesus, your invitation is open for everyone—come and see! Learn from me! Help us to be your students, and to invite others to learn from you, too.

Plant:

John 1:43-51 (MSG)

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. When he got there, he ran across Philip and said, "Come, follow me." (Philip's hometown was Bethsaida, the same as Andrew and Peter.)

Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, "We've found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It's Jesus, Joseph's son, the one from Nazareth!" Nathanael said, "Nazareth? You've got to be kidding."

But Philip said, "Come, see for yourself."

When Jesus saw him coming he said, "There's a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body."

Nathanael said, "Where did you get that idea? You don't know me."

Jesus answered, "One day, long before Philip called you here, I saw you under the fig tree."

Nathanael exclaimed, "Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!"

Jesus said, "You've become a believer simply because I say I saw you one day sitting under the fig tree? You haven't seen anything yet! Before this is over you're going to see heaven open and God's angels descending to the Son of Man and ascending again."

Water:

- » **Create it:** Draw a picture or make a Silly Putty sculpture based on today's reading.
- » **Apply it:** In this story, Philip, one of Jesus' students, goes and invites Nathanael to join in and "see for himself" what Jesus is like. What is something you are learning from Jesus? Is there anyone you could invite to learn that from Him, too? How could you invite people to learn from Jesus today?

Weed:

- » Did you have an opportunity to invite anyone to learn from Jesus today? How did that go?

‡ Week One of Lent

Sunday

Till:

Jesus, we are waiting for you to come for us! Help us learn that you are better than anything we give up. Come quickly!

Plant:

Mark 2:18-22 (MSG)

The disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees made a practice of fasting. Some people confronted Jesus: "Why do the followers of John and the Pharisees take on the discipline of fasting, but your followers don't?"

Jesus said, "When you're celebrating a wedding, you don't skimp on the cake and wine. You feast. Later you may need to pull in your belt, but not now. As long as the bride and groom are with you, you have a good time. No one throws cold water on a friendly bonfire. This is Kingdom Come!"

He went on, "No one cuts up a fine silk scarf to patch old work clothes; you want fabrics that match. And you don't put your wine in cracked bottles."

Additional readings for the first Sunday of Lent:

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

Water:

- » **Enter it:** In this passage, Jesus talks about fasting—giving up food or something else in order to focus on God. While he was here, his disciples didn't fast because it was a celebration! What would it be like if you went to a birthday party, but refused to eat cake and acted really sad? How would the birthday child feel about that?

- » **Apply it:** Right now, though, we are waiting for Jesus to come for us. Talk about what you have chosen to give up during this season of Lent: how can this “fast” remind you to look for Jesus today? (Or, if you are taking Sundays off of the fast, how can enjoying this thing today remind you to rejoice in Jesus?)

Weed:

- » Did your fast help you look for Jesus today? (Or, if you are taking Sundays off of the fast, did enjoying this thing today remind you to rejoice in Jesus?)
- » How can your “fasting” tomorrow be a reminder to look for Jesus?

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Monday

Till:

Jesus, you take ordinary things and make them extraordinary! Help us be faithful in our daily lives, and trust you to make them beautiful.

Plant:

John 2:1-12 (MSG)

Three days later there was a wedding in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples were guests also. When they started running low on wine at the wedding banquet, Jesus' mother told him, "They're just about out of wine."

Jesus said, "Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me."

She went ahead anyway, telling the servants, "Whatever he tells you, do it."

Six stoneware water pots were there, used by the Jews for ritual washings. Each held twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus ordered the servants, "Fill the pots with water." And they filled them to the brim.

"Now fill your pitchers and take them to the host," Jesus said, and they did.

When the host tasted the water that had become wine (he didn't know what had just happened but the servants, of course, knew), he called out to the bridegroom, "Everybody I know begins with their finest wines and after the guests have had their fill brings in the cheap stuff. But you've saved the best till now!"

This act in Cana of Galilee was the first sign Jesus gave, the first glimpse of his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum along with his mother, brothers, and disciples, and stayed several days.

Water:

- » **Play it:** Have children act out this story. This can be especially fun if you have the child playing Jesus drop in some red food coloring into a pitcher of water and mix it (just be sure to explain that Jesus didn't really need to add food coloring!).
- » **Enter it:** Water is ordinary, but wine is for celebrations. What is ordinary day that you can be faithful today? How can you ask Jesus to make that ordinary obedience into something wonderful?

Weed:

- » How were you every-day-obedient today?
- » Where did you see God's extraordinary work today? Let's celebrate that by thanking God!

Tuesday

Till:

Jesus, clear out of our lives everything that keeps us from you! You are full of zeal that we be able to come to you, and to your Father. Do whatever it takes, Jesus!

Plant:

John 2:13-22 (MSG)

When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.

Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, "Get your things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a shopping mall!" That's when his disciples remembered the

Scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

But the Jews were upset. They asked, "What credentials can you present to justify this?" Jesus answered, "Tear down this Temple and in three days I'll put it back together."

They were indignant: "It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you're going to rebuild it in three days?" But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and what Jesus had said.

Water:

- » **Play it:** This scene could be very fun to act, but use your judgment on how riled up you're willing to let your kids get. One calmer game would be to scatter toys, Legos, stuffed animals, and change around the floor of a room and have kids sweep them out with a broom.
- » **Apply it:** Jesus was passionate that nothing get in the way of people knowing God! People had started to use the Temple to do business, instead of making room for everyone to worship God. Are there things in your life that sometimes distract you from God? How could you return your attention to him today?

Weed:

- » Where were you able to return your attention to God today?
 - » Was there any time you were distracted from God today? How could you invite him into that time tomorrow?
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Wednesday

Till:

God, we need you—on our own, we don't know how to live, how to follow you, how to love others. We don't have enough strength. Please come and give us a whole new kind of life so we can really live, in you.

Plant:

John 2:23–3:15 (MSG)

During the time he was in Jerusalem, those days of the Passover Feast, many people noticed the signs he was displaying and, seeing they pointed straight to God, entrusted their lives to him. But Jesus didn't entrust his life to them. He knew them inside and out, knew how untrustworthy they were. He didn't need any help in seeing right through them.

There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it."

Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom."

"How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?"

Jesus said, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-the-water' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

"So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God."

Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?"

Jesus said, "You're a respected teacher of Israel and you don't know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God?"

"No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and

expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** This is a long and tricky passage, but one thing is clear: Jesus is teaching us that life with God isn't something we can pull off ourselves. It's something God gives, sometimes in ways we don't understand. We need his help. Can you name some things that you need help doing?
- » **Apply it:** What do you need God's help with today? How can you invite him in to help you?

Weed:

- » How did you ask God to help you today?
 - » How did it feel asking for His help? What happened?
-

Thursday

Till:

God, you love us so much, you're willing to forgive us everything we do wrong—so much, that you'd send your Son to save us! Help us to accept your love and not hide from you today.

Plant:

John 3:16-21 (MSG)

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

"This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, ad-

dicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is."

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Create a picture of this verse: "God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness." Why do you think people hide from God's love and truth?
- » **Apply it:** Jesus is showing us what God is like—he wants to forgive everything, and put the world right! How does this passage make you feel about God? About Jesus?

Weed:

- » How did knowing God's love help you today?
 - » Did you feel like hiding from God today? Why?
-

Friday

Till:

Jesus, you are greater than anyone else! You deserve all our love and attention and obedience. Help us to point to you, instead of making a big deal about ourselves.

Plant:

John 3:22-36 (MSG)

After this conversation, Jesus went on with his disciples into the Judean countryside and relaxed with them there. He was also baptizing. At the same time, John was baptizing over at Aenon near Salim, where water was abundant. This was before John was thrown into jail. John's disciples got into an argument with the establishment Jews over the nature of baptism. They came to John and said, "Rabbi, you know the one who was with you on the other side of the Jordan? The one you authorized with your witness? Well, he's now competing with us. He's baptizing, too, and everyone's going to him instead of us."

John answered, "It's not possible for a person to succeed—I'm talking about eternal success—without heaven's help. You yourselves were there when I made it public

that I was not the Messiah but simply the one sent ahead of him to get things ready. The one who gets the bride is, by definition, the bridegroom. And the bridegroom's friend, his 'best man'—that's me—in place at his side where he can hear every word, is genuinely happy. How could he be jealous when he knows that the wedding is finished and the marriage is off to a good start?

"That's why my cup is running over. This is the assigned moment for him to move into the center, while I slip off to the sidelines.

"The One who comes from above is head and shoulders over other messengers from God. The earthborn is earthbound and speaks earth language; the heavenborn is in a league of his own. He sets out the evidence of what he saw and heard in heaven. No one wants to deal with these facts. But anyone who examines this evidence will come to stake his life on this: that God himself is the truth.

"The One that God sent speaks God's words. And don't think he rations out the Spirit in bits and pieces. The Father loves the Son extravagantly. He turned everything over to him so he could give it away—a lavish distribution of gifts. That is why whoever accepts and trusts the Son gets in on everything, life complete and forever! And that is also why the person who avoids and distrusts the Son is in the dark and doesn't see life. All he experiences of God is darkness, and an angry darkness at that."

Water:

- » **Apply it:** In this passage, John the Baptizer shares that he is perfectly willing to give up the spotlight so that people can know Jesus. He isn't attached to people's praise; he doesn't need to be the center of attention. Think of someone who you could make a big deal about today—someone that you could encourage, or do something for, and make them feel special. Who can you serve today? And how? Make a plan.

Weed:

- » How did it feel to make a big deal about someone else? How did it feel to see them feel special and loved?
- » How can you practice being a servant tomorrow?

Saturday

Till:

God, we are thirsty for your love. Sometimes we try to quench our thirst in the wrong ways. Forgive us, and help us thirst just for you, because you will fill us up!

Plant:

John 4:1-26 (MSG)

Jesus realized that the Pharisees were keeping count of the baptisms that he and John performed (although his disciples, not Jesus, did the actual baptizing). They had posted the score that Jesus was ahead, turning him and John into rivals in the eyes of the people. So Jesus left the Judean countryside and went back to Galilee.

To get there, he had to pass through Samaria. He came into Sychar, a Samaritan village that bordered the field Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was still there. Jesus, worn out by the trip, sat down at the well. It was noon.

A woman, a Samaritan, came to draw water. Jesus said, "Would you give me a drink of water?" (His disciples had gone to the village to buy food for lunch.)

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, "How come you, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews in those days wouldn't be caught dead talking to Samaritans.)

Jesus answered, "If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give you fresh, living water."

The woman said, "Sir, you don't even have a bucket to draw with, and this well is deep. So how are you going to get this 'living water'? Are you a better man than our ancestor Jacob, who dug this well and drank from it, he and his sons and livestock, and passed it down to us?"

Jesus said, "Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."

The woman said, "Sir, give me this water so I won't ever get thirsty, won't ever have to come back to this well again!"

He said, "Go call your husband and then come back."

"I have no husband," she said.

"That's nicely put: 'I have no husband.' You've had five husbands, and the man you're living with now isn't even your husband. You spoke the truth there, sure enough."

"Oh, so you're a prophet! Well, tell me this: Our ancestors worshiped God at this mountain, but you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place for worship, right?"

"Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you Samaritans will worship the Father neither here at this mountain nor there in Jerusalem. You worship guessing in the dark; we Jews worship in the clear light of day. God's way of salvation is made available through the Jews. But the time is coming—it has, in fact, come—when what you're called will not matter and where you go to worship will not matter.

"It's who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That's the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly themselves before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself—Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration."

The woman said, "I don't know about that. I do know that the Messiah is coming. When he arrives, we'll get the whole story."

"I am he," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further."

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Draw the scene of Jesus talking with the woman at the well. What is the expression on Jesus' face? How does he feel about this woman?
- » **Enter it:** Jesus is teaching that He is like a well of water that is always fresh, always refreshing. But we try to drink from stagnant, murky pools and aren't satisfied. This woman was trying to be happy in all her many marriages. Can you think of some ways you try to satisfy your thirst apart from Jesus?
- » **Apply it:** How is your Lenten fast affecting you? Is it helping you turn toward Jesus more?

Weed:

- » Today, where did you feel "thirsty?" Were you able to bring this to Jesus?

* Week Two of Lent

Sunday

Till:

Jesus, we are all ears—we are listening to you! Help us to listen even more to you. Help us obey, so we could be students who learn to be just like their teacher.

Plant:

Mark 3:31–4:9 (MSG)

Just then his mother and brothers showed up. Standing outside, they relayed a message that they wanted a word with him. He was surrounded by the crowd when he was given the message, "Your mother and brothers and sisters are outside looking for you."

Jesus responded, "Who do you think are my mother and brothers?" Looking around, taking in everyone seated around him, he said, "Right here, right in front of you—my mother and my brothers. Obedience is thicker than blood. The person who obeys God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

He went back to teaching by the sea. A crowd built up to such a great size that he had to get into an offshore boat, using the boat as a pulpit as the people pushed to the water's edge. He taught by using stories, many stories.

"Listen. What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn't put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled among the weeds and nothing came of it. Some fell on good earth and came up with a flourish, producing a harvest exceeding his wildest dreams.

"Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

Additional readings for the second Sunday of Lent:

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

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Create a picture of the plants in each of the four soils: the hard road, the gravel, the weeds, and the good earth. Which of these soils describes how you would like to listen to God?
- » **Apply it:** Jesus tells us that the people who are his students—who learn from him and obey him—are as close to him as family. How does it make you feel to know you're in God's family? What is one way you could act like Jesus' family today?

Weed:

- » Where did you have an opportunity to act like Jesus' family by obeying Him today?
- » Was it hard to obey at any point today? Let's ask Jesus to help us tomorrow.

Monday

Till:

Father, your way is real food that keeps us filled up. Help us to always enjoy the plenty that comes with obeying you!

Plant:

John 4:27-42 (MSG)

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked. They couldn't believe he was talking with that kind of a woman. No one said what they were all thinking, but their faces showed it.

The woman took the hint and left. In her confusion she left her water pot. Back in the village she told the people, "Come see a man who knew all about the things I did, who knows me inside and out. Do you think this could be the Messiah?" And they went out to see for themselves.

In the meantime, the disciples pressed him, "Rabbi, eat. Aren't you going to eat?"

He told them, "I have food to eat you know nothing about."

The disciples were puzzled. "Who could have brought him food?"

Jesus said, "The food that keeps me going is that I do the will of the One who sent me, finishing the work he started. As you look around right now, wouldn't you say that in about four months it will be time to harvest? Well, I'm telling you to open your eyes and take a good look at what's right in front of you. These Samaritan fields are ripe. It's harvest time!

"The Harvester isn't waiting. He's taking his pay, gathering in this grain that's ripe for eternal life. Now the Sower is arm in arm with the Harvester, triumphant. That's the truth of the saying, 'This one sows, that one harvests.' I sent you to harvest a field you never worked. Without lifting a finger, you have walked in on a field worked long and hard by others."

Many of the Samaritans from that village committed themselves to him because of the woman's witness: "He knew all about the things I did. He knows me inside and out!" They asked him to stay on, so Jesus stayed two days. A lot more people entrusted their lives to him when they heard what he had to say. They said to the woman, "We're no longer taking this on your say-so. We've heard it for ourselves and know it for sure. He's the Savior of the world!"

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus knows where real life is found, and he says that for him, obeying his Father is like eating a scrumptious meal. How does it make you feel when you know you have pleased your parents? Pleased God?
- » **Apply it:** during Lent, we're giving up something so we can follow God with a little less distraction. Can you use your "fast" as a "trigger" to turn your heart toward loving God in obedience?

Weed:

- » Did you find a way to obey God today? How did it feel?
- » How is your "fast" making you feel? How is it making you feel about God?

Tuesday

Till:

Jesus, heal us! We bring you our worries, our bad habits, our sickness and sadness. It's life or death for us—but if you just say the word, we will be healed! You are in control.

Plant:

John 4:43-54 (MSG)

After the two days he left for Galilee. Now, Jesus knew well from experience that a prophet is not respected in the place where he grew up. So when he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, but only because they were impressed with what he had done in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast, not that they really had a clue about who he was or what he was up to.

Now he was back in Cana of Galilee, the place where he made the water into wine. Meanwhile in Capernaum, there was a certain official from the king's court whose son was sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and asked that he come down and heal his son, who was on the brink of death. Jesus put him off: "Unless you people are dazzled by a miracle, you refuse to believe."

But the court official wouldn't be put off. "Come down! It's life or death for my son."

Jesus simply replied, "Go home. Your son lives."

The man believed the bare word Jesus spoke and headed home. On his way back, his servants intercepted him and announced, "Your son lives!"

He asked them what time he began to get better. They said, "The fever broke yesterday afternoon at one o'clock." The father knew that that was the very moment Jesus had said, "Your son lives."

That clinched it. Not only he but his entire household believed. This was now the second sign Jesus gave after having come from Judea into Galilee.

Water:

- » **Imagine it:** How do you think the father felt when he discovered his son was healed? How do you think his family felt when they found out that Jesus had healed the son?
- » **Apply it:** What is something you need Jesus' help with? A fear, sadness, bad habit, or sickness? Let's ask for his help, just for today.

Weed:

- » How did Jesus help you today?
 - » Do you find it easy or hard to trust Jesus with hard things? Why? Let's pray for more trust.
-

Wednesday

Till:

God, you love it when we show love to others and care for them—that's more important to you than just following the rules. Help us to see how we can help people around us.

Plant:

John 5:1-18 (MSG)

Soon another Feast came around and Jesus was back in Jerusalem.

Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there was a pool, in Hebrew called Bethesda, with five alcoves. Hundreds of sick people—blind, crippled, paralyzed—were in these alcoves. One man had been an invalid there for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him stretched out by the pool and knew how long he had been there, he said, "Do you want to get well?"

The sick man said, "Sir, when the water is stirred, I don't have anybody to put me in the pool. By the time I get there, somebody else is already in."

Jesus said, "Get up, take your bedroll, start walking." The man was healed on the spot. He picked up his bedroll and walked off.

That day happened to be the Sabbath. The Jews stopped the healed man and said, "It's the Sabbath. You can't carry your bedroll around. It's against the rules."

But he told them, "The man who made me well told me to. He said, 'Take your bedroll and start walking.'"

They asked, "Who gave you the order to take it up and start walking?" But the healed man didn't know, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd.

A little later Jesus found him in the Temple and said, "You look wonderful! You're well! Don't return to a sinning life or something worse might happen."

The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. That is why the Jews were out to get Jesus—because he did this kind of thing on the Sabbath.

But Jesus defended himself. "My Father is working straight through, even on the Sabbath. So am I."

That really set them off. The Jews were now not only out to expose him; they were out to kill him. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was calling God his own Father, putting himself on a level with God.

Water:

- » **Play it:** have children act out this scene. Have someone play Jesus, the crippled man, and the Pharisees who respond angrily.
- » **Apply it:** In today's story, Jesus healed a crippled man—but some people just got mad because they were only focusing on keeping rules. They missed the joy of a miracle because it didn't fit into their rule-books! Jesus is more focused on loving and serving others. What is one way you could focus on loving others today?

Weed:

- » How did it feel to focus on loving others? What were you able to do?
- » Was it different to focus on love, instead of focusing on keeping rules?

Thursday

Till:

God, you have made life with you available—right now! You have put Jesus in charge, and he brings us to know and live with you. Help us wake up to you today.

Plant:

John 5:19-29 (MSG)

So Jesus explained himself at length. "I'm telling you this straight. The Son can't independently do a thing, only what he sees the Father doing. What the Father does, the Son does. The Father loves the Son and includes him in everything he is doing.

"But you haven't seen the half of it yet, for in the same way that the Father raises the dead and creates life, so does the Son. The Son gives life to anyone he chooses. Neither he nor the Father shuts anyone out. The Father handed all authority to judge over to the Son so that the Son will be honored equally with the Father. Anyone who

dishonors the Son, dishonors the Father, for it was the Father's decision to put the Son in the place of honor.

"It's urgent that you listen carefully to this: Anyone here who believes what I am saying right now and aligns himself with the Father, who has in fact put me in charge, has at this very moment the real, lasting life and is no longer condemned to be an outsider. This person has taken a giant step from the world of the dead to the world of the living.

"It's urgent that you get this right: The time has arrived—I mean right now!—when dead men and women will hear the voice of the Son of God and, hearing, will come alive. Just as the Father has life in himself, he has conferred on the Son life in himself. And he has given him the authority, simply because he is the Son of Man, to decide and carry out matters of Judgment.

"Don't act so surprised at all this. The time is coming when everyone dead and buried will hear his voice. Those who have lived the right way will walk out into a resurrection Life; those who have lived the wrong way, into a resurrection Judgment.

Water:

- » **Apply it:** Jesus says that God has put him in charge, and right now Jesus is giving us real life, close to God our Father! How can you include God in your day today?

Weed:

- » Where did you include God in your day today?
- » How did it feel when you knew God was with you?

Friday

Till:

Jesus, you amaze us—though you are equal with your Father, you don't push ahead without Him. You are happy to trust your Father, and wait for Him to make much of you. Help us, also, to trust our Father and trust you.

Plant:

John 5:30-47 (MSG)

"I can't do a solitary thing on my own: I listen, then I decide. You can trust my decision because I'm not out to get my own way but only to carry out orders. If I were simply speaking on my own account, it would be an empty, self-serving witness. But an independent witness confirms me, the most reliable Witness of all. Furthermore, you all saw and heard John, and he gave expert and reliable testimony about me, didn't he?

"But my purpose is not to get your vote, and not to appeal to mere human testimony. I'm speaking to you this way so that you will be saved. John was a torch, blazing and bright, and you were glad enough to dance for an hour or so in his bright light. But the witness that really confirms me far exceeds John's witness. It's the work the Father gave me to complete. These very tasks, as I go about completing them, confirm that the Father, in fact, sent me. The Father who sent me, confirmed me. And you missed it. You never heard his voice, you never saw his appearance. There is nothing left in your memory of his Message because you do not take his Messenger seriously.

"You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want.

"I'm not interested in crowd approval. And do you know why? Because I know you and your crowds. I know that love, especially God's love, is not on your working agenda. I came with the authority of my Father, and you either dismiss me or avoid me. If another came, acting self-important, you would welcome him with open arms. How do you expect to get anywhere with God when you spend all your time jockeying for position with each other, ranking your rivals and ignoring God?

"But don't think I'm going to accuse you before my Father. Moses, in whom you put so much stock, is your accuser. If you believed, really believed, what Moses said, you would believe me. He wrote of me. If you won't take seriously what he wrote, how can I expect you to take seriously what I speak?"

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus say that, even though he is God, and has all power, he never does anything on his own. Instead, he listens, patiently, and works only with his Father. Is that surprising to you? How do people with power normally act?
- » **Apply it:** Where is one area where you could practice listening to God and obeying Him today?

Weed:

- » When did you listen for God today? How did it feel?
- » When is it hard to listen for God?

Saturday

Till:

Father, forgive us—sometimes we hide from you because we don't like being corrected when we're wrong. Help us have courage to admit our faults, and stay close to you.

Plant:

John 7:1-13 (MSG)

Later Jesus was going about his business in Galilee. He didn't want to travel in Judea because the Jews there were looking for a chance to kill him. It was near the time of Tabernacles, a feast observed annually by the Jews.

His brothers said, "Why don't you leave here and go up to the Feast so your disciples can get a good look at the works you do? No one who intends to be publicly known does everything behind the scenes. If you're serious about what you are doing, come out in the open and show the world." His brothers were pushing him like this because they didn't believe in him either.

Jesus came back at them, "Don't crowd me. This isn't my time. It's your time—it's always your time; you have nothing to lose. The world has nothing against you, but it's up in arms against me. It's against me because I expose the evil behind its pretensions. You go ahead, go up to the Feast. Don't wait for me. I'm not ready. It's not the right time for me."

He said this and stayed on in Galilee. But later, after his family had gone up to the Feast, he also went. But he kept out of the way, careful not to draw attention to himself. The Jews were already out looking for him, asking around, "Where is that man?"

There was a lot of contentious talk about him circulating through the crowds. Some were saying, "He's a good man." But others said, "Not so. He's selling snake oil." This kind of talk went on in guarded whispers because of the intimidating Jewish leaders.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus says that the world is “up in arms” against him, because he exposes its evil. Why do you think people don’t like admitting they are wrong?
- » **Apply it:** Confession is an important way to stay close to God—it means, “to say the same thing.” So we admit to God that what he calls wrong, is wrong, and that we need forgiveness. Today, take some time to write a note to God, or talk to Him aloud, admitting mistakes and asking for His forgiveness.

Weed:

- » How did it feel to take time for confession? How does it feel to know God forgives you?
- » Read 1 John 1:9 (we read it earlier during Lent, but it’s a good reminder). Before going to bed, offer each other a blessing, remind each other that we are forgiven. (For example, lay a hand on your child’s shoulder or head, look them in the eye and say, “In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven, and you are God’s beloved child. Amen.”)

🌿 *Week Three of Lent*

Sunday

Till:

Jesus, you are powerful! You can defeat any evil, and drive away any enemy that would harm us. We are amazed by you!

Plant:

Mark 5:1-20 (MSG)

They arrived on the other side of the sea in the country of the Gerasenes. As Jesus got out of the boat, a madman from the cemetery came up to him. He lived there among the tombs and graves. No one could restrain him—he couldn't be chained, couldn't be tied down. He had been tied up many times with chains and ropes, but he broke the chains, snapped the ropes. No one was strong enough to tame him. Night and day he roamed through the graves and the hills, screaming out and slashing himself with sharp stones.

When he saw Jesus a long way off, he ran and bowed in worship before him—then bellowed in protest, "What business do you have, Jesus, Son of the High God, messing with me? I swear to God, don't give me a hard time!" (Jesus had just commanded the tormenting evil spirit, "Out! Get out of the man!")

Jesus asked him, "Tell me your name."

He replied, "My name is Mob. I'm a rioting mob." Then he desperately begged Jesus not to banish them from the country.

A large herd of pigs was browsing and rooting on a nearby hill. The demons begged him, "Send us to the pigs so we can live in them." Jesus gave the order. But it was even worse for the pigs than for the man. Crazed, they stampeded over a cliff into the sea and drowned.

Those tending the pigs, scared to death, bolted and told their story in town and country. Everyone wanted to see what had happened. They came up to Jesus and saw the madman sitting there wearing decent clothes and making sense, no longer a walking madhouse of a man.

Those who had seen it told the others what had happened to the demon-possessed man and the pigs. At first they were in awe—and then they were upset, upset over the drowned pigs. They demanded that Jesus leave and not come back.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the demon-delivered man begged to go along, but he wouldn't let him. Jesus said, "Go home to your own people. Tell them your story—what the Master did, how he had mercy on you." The man went back and began to preach in the Ten Towns area about what Jesus had done for him. He was the talk of the town.

Additional readings for the third Sunday of Lent:

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

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Make a drawing of part of this story that captures your imagination. Share your drawing and tell why you chose this part of the story.
- » **Apply it:** Jesus shows that he has power even over a rioting mob of evil spirits. Where do you need to see that Jesus is powerful today?

Weed:

- » Did you see Jesus' power today? Where? Describe what you saw.
- » Let's pray that Jesus' power will stay with us and protect us tonight.

Monday

Till:

Jesus, you take what little we have and turn it into a miracle of plenty! Small things make a big difference in your hands. Use our small lives in big ways today, for your kingdom!

Plant:

John 6:1-15 (MSG)

After this, Jesus went across the Sea of Galilee (some call it Tiberias). A huge crowd followed him, attracted by the miracles they had seen him do among the sick. When he got to the other side, he climbed a hill and sat down, surrounded by his disciples. It was nearly time for the Feast of Passover, kept annually by the Jews.

When Jesus looked out and saw that a large crowd had arrived, he said to Philip, "Where can we buy bread to feed these people?" He said this to stretch Philip's faith. He already knew what he was going to do.

Philip answered, "Two hundred silver pieces wouldn't be enough to buy bread for each person to get a piece."

One of the disciples—it was Andrew, brother to Simon Peter—said, "There's a little boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But that's a drop in the bucket for a crowd like this."

Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was a nice carpet of green grass in this place. They sat down, about five thousand of them. Then Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, gave it to those who were seated. He did the same with the fish. All ate as much as they wanted.

When the people had eaten their fill, he said to his disciples, "Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted." They went to work and filled twelve large baskets with leftovers from the five barley loaves.

The people realized that God was at work among them in what Jesus had just done. They said, "This is the Prophet for sure, God's Prophet right here in Galilee!" Jesus saw that in their enthusiasm, they were about to grab him and make him king, so he slipped off and went back up the mountain to be by himself.

Water:

- » **Play it:** Have children act out this story. What are the expressions on the disciple's faces as Jesus multiplies the bread and fish?
- » **Enter it:** How do you think the disciples felt about Jesus when they saw this miracle? How do you feel about him?

Weed:

- » Where were you surprised by God today? Did he do something you didn't expect?
- » Was there a time when you didn't feel like you could do something, but God helped you through it?

Tuesday

Till:

Jesus, what you provide lasts forever. Give us what we need today, and we will be content with what we receive from you.

Plant:

John 6:16-27 (MSG)

In the evening his disciples went down to the sea, got in the boat, and headed back across the water to Capernaum. It had grown quite dark and Jesus had not yet returned. A huge wind blew up, churning the sea. They were maybe three or four miles out when they saw Jesus walking on the sea, quite near the boat. They were scared senseless, but he reassured them, "It's me. It's all right. Don't be afraid." So they took him on board. In no time they reached land—the exact spot they were headed to.

The next day the crowd that was left behind realized that there had been only one boat, and that Jesus had not gotten into it with his disciples. They had seen them go off without him. By now boats from Tiberias had pulled up near where they had eaten the bread blessed by the Master. So when the crowd realized he was gone and wasn't coming back, they piled into the Tiberias boats and headed for Capernaum, looking for Jesus.

When they found him back across the sea, they said, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "You've come looking for me not because you saw God in my actions but because I fed you, filled your stomachs—and for free.

"Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last."

Water:

- » **Create it:** Draw a picture or create a silly putty sculpture of Jesus walking on the water by his disciples' boat.
- » **Apply it:** In yesterday and today's readings, Jesus shows that he is powerful. Then he makes a promise—since he is powerful, he can meet all our needs. We don't need to strive; instead we can draw close to him and trust Him to provide. Where can you trust Jesus to provide today?

Weed:

- » How did Jesus provide for you today?
 - » Did you take time to thank Jesus? Why or why not? Let's take time to do that now.
-

Wednesday

Till:

Jesus, we're throwing our lot in with you! There's nothing better for us than to live with you, trusting you. Help us to remember your power to save us today.

Plant:

John 6:27-40 (MSG)

"Don't waste your energy striving for perishable food like that. Work for the food that sticks with you, food that nourishes your lasting life, food the Son of Man provides. He and what he does are guaranteed by God the Father to last."

To that they said, "Well, what do we do then to get in on God's works?"

Jesus said, "Throw your lot in with the One that God has sent. That kind of a commitment gets you in on God's works."

They waffled: "Why don't you give us a clue about who you are, just a hint of what's going on? When we see what's up, we'll commit ourselves. Show us what you can do. Moses fed our ancestors with bread in the desert. It says so in the Scriptures: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus responded, "The real significance of that Scripture is not that Moses gave you bread from heaven but that my Father is right now offering you bread from heaven, the real bread. The Bread of God came down out of heaven and is giving life to the world."

They jumped at that: "Master, give us this bread, now and forever!"

Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life. The person who aligns with me hungers no more and thirsts no more, ever. I have told you this explicitly because even though you have seen me in action, you don't really believe me. Every person the Father gives me eventually comes running to me. And once that person is with me, I hold on and don't let go. I came down from heaven not to follow my own whim but to accomplish the will of the One who sent me.

"This, in a nutshell, is that will: that everything handed over to me by the Father be

completed—not a single detail missed—and at the wrap-up of time I have everything and everyone put together, upright and whole. This is what my Father wants: that anyone who sees the Son and trusts who he is and what he does and then aligns with him will enter real life, eternal life. My part is to put them on their feet alive and whole at the completion of time."

Water:

- » **Imagine it:** What would happen if you tried to sit on a tree limb that was too small? Or walk across a bridge that was too weak? Why do you think it is safe to put all the weight of our lives on Jesus?
- » **Apply it:** Let's practice putting our weight on Jesus today. Whenever you feel overwhelmed, or frustrated, imagine that all the burden you feel is resting squarely on Jesus' shoulders, and you're safe in his arms. Do this throughout the day.

Weed:

- » When did you throw your weight on Jesus' shoulders? How did it feel?
 - » Did you forget, or try to shoulder the weight alone? How did that feel?
-

Thursday

Till:

Jesus, you are the Bread of life—your presence and power nourishes us and sustains us each day. Always give us this bread—always give us yourself!

Plant:

John 6:41-51 (MSG)

At this, because he said, "I am the Bread that came down from heaven," the Jews started arguing over him: "Isn't this the son of Joseph? Don't we know his father? Don't we know his mother? How can he now say, 'I came down out of heaven' and expect anyone to believe him?"

Jesus said, "Don't bicker among yourselves over me. You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me—that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their

feet, ready for the End. This is what the prophets meant when they wrote, 'And then they will all be personally taught by God.' Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to the Father, really listening and therefore learning, comes to me to be taught personally—to see it with his own eyes, hear it with his own ears, from me, since I have it firsthand from the Father. No one has seen the Father except the One who has his Being alongside the Father—and you can see me.

"I'm telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. Your ancestors ate the manna bread in the desert and died. But now here is Bread that truly comes down out of heaven. Anyone eating this Bread will not die, ever. I am the Bread—living Bread!—who came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this Bread will live—and forever! The Bread that I present to the world so that it can eat and live is myself, this flesh-and-blood self."

Water:

- » **Create it:** If you have time (or a bread machine), bake a loaf of bread and set it aside. Put it on your Family Altar as a reminder that Jesus is the bread of life! (Later on, when it gets stale, you could use it to go feed birds or ducks at a park, and think of Jesus blessing His creation.) If time is short, you could have kids draw a picture, or just use a store-bought loaf of bread.
- » **Apply it:** During Lent we are giving up something that we usually hope will nourish or sustain us. How can your fasting today remind you that Jesus is the Bread of life?

Weed:

- » What are you learning from your Lent fast?
- » When are you experiencing Jesus making up for the lack of the thing you've given up?

Friday

Till:

Jesus, you broke your body and shed your blood so that we could live, free from shame and free from sin. How can we thank you? Help us marvel at your mercy and love today.

Plant:

John 6:52-59 (MSG)

At this, the Jews started fighting among themselves: "How can this man serve up his flesh for a meal?"

But Jesus didn't give an inch. "Only insofar as you eat and drink flesh and blood, the flesh and blood of the Son of Man, do you have life within you. The one who brings a hearty appetite to this eating and drinking has eternal life and will be fit and ready for the Final Day. My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. By eating my flesh and drinking my blood you enter into me and I into you. In the same way that the fully alive Father sent me here and I live because of him, so the one who makes a meal of me lives because of me. This is the Bread from heaven. Your ancestors ate bread and later died. Whoever eats this Bread will live always."

He said these things while teaching in the meeting place in Capernaum.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Today's reading points to our need for Jesus, but it also reminds us of the symbol Jesus gave us in communion. Today, celebrate communion with your family. (If the children are too young, or in your tradition you take communion only from an ordained minister, another option is to put the elements as the centerpiece at dinner and talk about what they mean.)

Weed:

- » What does it mean to you that Jesus gave His body and blood to save you?
-

Saturday

Till:

Lord Jesus, we admit that your teachings are hard for us to swallow sometimes. It's hard to believe, hard to obey, hard to trust. Keep us from walking away, bring us to you! Let us see that you have real life, and it's nowhere else.

Plant:

John 6:60-71 (MSG)

Many among his disciples heard this and said, "This is tough teaching, too tough to

swallow."

Jesus sensed that his disciples were having a hard time with this and said, "Does this throw you completely? What would happen if you saw the Son of Man ascending to where he came from? The Spirit can make life. Sheer muscle and willpower don't make anything happen. Every word I've spoken to you is a Spirit-word, and so it is life-making. But some of you are resisting, refusing to have any part in this." (Jesus knew from the start that some weren't going to risk themselves with him. He knew also who would betray him.) He went on to say, "This is why I told you earlier that no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father."

After this a lot of his disciples left. They no longer wanted to be associated with him. Then Jesus gave the Twelve their chance: "Do you also want to leave?"

Peter replied, "Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."

Jesus responded, "Haven't I handpicked you, the Twelve? Still, one of you is a devil!" He was referring to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. This man—one from the Twelve!—was even then getting ready to betray him.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus kept on saying things that make people upset, make them leave. Why do you think the crowds left? Why do you think his 12 disciples stayed with Him?
- » **Apply it:** Sometimes what Jesus asks us to do or believe can be hard. What do you find it hard to believe sometimes? When do you find it hard to obey?

Weed:

- » Where did you stay close to Jesus today?
- » When did you want to leave him behind?



✠ Week Four of Lent

Sunday

Till:

Lord, help us! We are so quick to try to do life on our own, to think we know everything, to miss what you are doing because we are focused on what we are doing. Please clear out all our pride and make us rely on you!

Plant:

Mark 8:11-21 (MSG)

When they arrived, the Pharisees came out and started in on him, badgering him to prove himself, pushing him up against the wall. Provoked, he said, "Why does this generation clamor for miraculous guarantees? If I have anything to say about it, you'll not get so much as a hint of a guarantee."

He then left them, got back in the boat, and headed for the other side. But the disciples forgot to pack a lunch. Except for a single loaf of bread, there wasn't a crumb in the boat. Jesus warned, "Be very careful. Keep a sharp eye out for the contaminating yeast of Pharisees and the followers of Herod."

Meanwhile, the disciples were finding fault with each other because they had forgotten to bring bread. Jesus overheard and said, "Why are you fussing because you forgot bread? Don't you see the point of all this? Don't you get it at all? Remember the five loaves I broke for the five thousand? How many baskets of leftovers did you pick up?"

They said, "Twelve."

"And the seven loaves for the four thousand—how many bags full of leftovers did you get?"

"Seven."

He said, "Do you still not get it?"

Additional readings for the fourth Sunday of Lent:

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

Water:

- » **Create it:** Today Jesus warns the disciples against the “contaminating yeast” of the Phari-sees. Just a little bit of trying to do justify ourselves, can damage our reliance and trust on God and his kingdom. To help kids understand this point, fill a clear glass with water, then put in just a few drops of food coloring. Allow it to stand for a day, and observe what happens—all the water turns color!
- » **Apply it:** The disciples don’t seem to understand—they can rely on Jesus for every need! Here they are in the boat, squabbling about bread, when he’s just miraculously divided bread for thousands of people! Are there times when you tend to forget to rely on God, and focus only on what you can do?
- » **Live it:** Today, take “pause” moments to invite God to provide for you throughout the day.

Weed:

- » Where did you rely on God today? How did that feel?
 - » When did you try to do it on your own? How did that feel?
-

Monday

Till:

Jesus, you came from your Father in Heaven, and you went back to your Father in Heaven—all to reconcile us to Him! Thank you for helping us to know God.

Plant:

John 7:14-36 (MSG)

With the Feast already half over, Jesus showed up in the Temple, teaching. The Jews were impressed, but puzzled: "How does he know so much without being schooled?"

Jesus said, "I didn't make this up. What I teach comes from the One who sent me. Anyone who wants to do his will can test this teaching and know whether it's from God or whether I'm making it up. A person making things up tries to make himself

look good. But someone trying to honor the one who sent him sticks to the facts and doesn't tamper with reality. It was Moses, wasn't it, who gave you God's Law? But none of you are living it. So why are you trying to kill me?"

The crowd said, "You're crazy! Who's trying to kill you? You're demon-possessed."

Jesus said, "I did one miraculous thing a few months ago, and you're still standing around getting all upset, wondering what I'm up to. Moses prescribed circumcision—originally it came not from Moses but from his ancestors—and so you circumcise a man, dealing with one part of his body, even if it's the Sabbath. You do this in order to preserve one item in the Law of Moses. So why are you upset with me because I made a man's whole body well on the Sabbath? Don't be nitpickers; use your head—and heart!—to discern what is right, to test what is authentically right."

That's when some of the people of Jerusalem said, "Isn't this the one they were out to kill? And here he is out in the open, saying whatever he pleases, and no one is stopping him. Could it be that the rulers know that he is, in fact, the Messiah? And yet we know where this man came from. The Messiah is going to come out of nowhere. Nobody is going to know where he comes from."

That provoked Jesus, who was teaching in the Temple, to cry out, "Yes, you think you know me and where I'm from, but that's not where I'm from. I didn't set myself up in business. My true origin is in the One who sent me, and you don't know him at all. I come from him—that's how I know him. He sent me here."

They were looking for a way to arrest him, but not a hand was laid on him because it wasn't yet God's time. Many from the crowd committed themselves in faith to him, saying, "Will the Messiah, when he comes, provide better or more convincing evidence than this?"

The Pharisees, alarmed at this seditious undertow going through the crowd, teamed up with the high priests and sent their police to arrest him. Jesus rebuffed them: "I am with you only a short time. Then I go on to the One who sent me. You will look for me, but you won't find me. Where I am, you can't come."

The Jews put their heads together. "Where do you think he is going that we won't be able to find him? Do you think he is about to travel to the Greek world to teach the Jews? What is he talking about, anyway: 'You will look for me, but you won't find me,' and 'Where I am, you can't come'?"

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Draw the scene between Jesus and the Pharisees and the crowd. How does each group feel?
- » **Imagine it:** Jesus says that he was sent by his Father, so he knows Him. Jesus knows God better than anyone—because he spent eternity with God! How do you think Jesus feels

about His Father? How does the Father feel about Jesus, His Son?

- » **Enter it:** How does it make you feel to know that Jesus came to help us know God the Father?

Weed:

- » Did you spend any time with God, your Father, today? How was it?
 - » Where could you spend time with your Father tomorrow?
-

Tuesday

Till:

Holy Spirit, we are thirsty! We long for joy, love, happiness—and they are only found in your presence. Come and quench our thirst today, we ask you.

Plant:

John 7:37-52 (MSG)

On the final and climactic day of the Feast, Jesus took his stand. He cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says." (He said this in regard to the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were about to receive. The Spirit had not yet been given because Jesus had not yet been glorified.)

Those in the crowd who heard these words were saying, "This has to be the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Messiah!" But others were saying, "The Messiah doesn't come from Galilee, does he? Don't the Scriptures tell us that the Messiah comes from David's line and from Bethlehem, David's village?" So there was a split in the crowd over him. Some went so far as wanting to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him.

That's when the Temple police reported back to the high priests and Pharisees, who demanded, "Why didn't you bring him with you?"

The police answered, "Have you heard the way he talks? We've never heard anyone speak like this man."

The Pharisees said, "Are you carried away like the rest of the rabble? You don't see any of the leaders believing in him, do you? Or any from the Pharisees? It's only this crowd, ignorant of God's Law, that is taken in by him—and damned."

Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus earlier and was both a ruler and a Pharisee, spoke up. "Does our Law decide about a man's guilt without first listening to him and finding out what he is doing?"

But they cut him off. "Are you also campaigning for the Galilean? Examine the evidence. See if any prophet ever comes from Galilee."

Then they all went home.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus is talking about thirst again. Do you remember when we talked about the woman at the well—how Jesus said he would give water so we would never thirst? What are some ways that you have “thirsted” over the past few weeks: things you’ve wanted, or hoped for.
- » **Apply it:** Has giving something up for Lent affected how you thirst for God?

Weed:

- » Where did you thirst today?
- » How can you take your thirst to God tomorrow?

Wednesday

Till:

Jesus, you are our light! Show us the way to live, to love others, to love you. Light up our path!

Plant:

John 8:12-20 (MSG)

Jesus once again addressed them: "I am the world's Light. No one who follows me stumbles around in the darkness. I provide plenty of light to live in."

The Pharisees objected, "All we have is your word on this. We need more than this to go on."

Jesus replied, "You're right that you only have my word. But you can depend on it being true. I know where I've come from and where I go next. You don't know where I'm from or where I'm headed. You decide according to what you can see and touch. I

don't make judgments like that. But even if I did, my judgment would be true because I wouldn't make it out of the narrowness of my experience but in the largeness of the One who sent me, the Father. That fulfills the conditions set down in God's Law: that you can count on the testimony of two witnesses. And that is what you have: You have my word and you have the word of the Father who sent me."

They said, "Where is this so-called Father of yours?"

Jesus said, "You're looking right at me and you don't see me. How do you expect to see the Father? If you knew me, you would at the same time know the Father."

He gave this speech in the Treasury while teaching in the Temple. No one arrested him because his time wasn't yet up.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Light a candle to symbolize Jesus as your light (especially in a dark room, if you can). Or, give kids flashlights. Discuss, how is Jesus the light for your life?
- » **Apply it:** What is one situation where you need Jesus' light to show you how to live?

Weed:

- » Where did you need Jesus' light today? Did you ask for it?
 - » Where do you need Jesus' light tomorrow?
-

Thursday

Till:

Jesus, help us to live in the truth, so we can be free from the tangles we get caught in. Lies trap and ensnare us, but your truth sets us free!

Plant:

John 8:21-32 (MSG)

Then he went over the same ground again. "I'm leaving and you are going to look for me, but you're missing God in this and are headed for a dead end. There is no way you can come with me."

The Jews said, "So, is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by 'You can't

come with me'?"

Jesus said, "You're tied down to the mundane; I'm in touch with what is beyond your horizons. You live in terms of what you see and touch. I'm living on other terms. I told you that you were missing God in all this. You're at a dead end. If you won't believe I am who I say I am, you're at the dead end of sins. You're missing God in your lives."

They said to him, "Just who are you anyway?"

Jesus said, "What I've said from the start. I have so many things to say that concern you, judgments to make that affect you, but if you don't accept the trustworthiness of the One who commanded my words and acts, none of it matters. That is who you are questioning—not me but the One who sent me."

They still didn't get it, didn't realize that he was referring to the Father. So Jesus tried again. "When you raise up the Son of Man, then you will know who I am—that I'm not making this up, but speaking only what the Father taught me. The One who sent me stays with me. He doesn't abandon me. He sees how much joy I take in pleasing him."

When he put it in these terms, many people decided to believe.

Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. "If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you."

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus says truth sets us free. Can you think of a time when being dishonest got you trapped or caught? When was a time when telling the truth was scary, but you did it anyway?
- » **Apply it:** Jesus teaches us that we don't need to lie. We live in God's kingdom, and he will take care of us as we live in truth. Let's try an experiment of not twisting, bending, or concealing the truth today (though you don't need to say things that would hurt people!).

Weed:

- » How was your truth experiment? When was it hard? When was it good?
- » When do you find it the hardest to tell the truth? How can you remember God's kingdom in that situation?

Friday

Till:

God, you are our Father—help us to behave like your children today. Help us to honor you, love you, and do what you're doing in our world today.

Plant:

John 8:33-47 (MSG)

Surprised, they said, "But we're descendants of Abraham. We've never been slaves to anyone. How can you say, 'The truth will free you?'"

Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can't come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through. I know you are Abraham's descendants. But I also know that you are trying to kill me because my message hasn't yet penetrated your thick skulls. I'm talking about things I have seen while keeping company with the Father, and you just go on doing what you have heard from your father."

They were indignant. "Our father is Abraham!"

Jesus said, "If you were Abraham's children, you would have been doing the things Abraham did. And yet here you are trying to kill me, a man who has spoken to you the truth he got straight from God! Abraham never did that sort of thing. You persist in repeating the works of your father."

They said, "We're not fatherless. We have a legitimate father: the one and only God."

"If God were your father," said Jesus, "you would love me, for I came from God and arrived here. I didn't come on my own. He sent me. Why can't you understand one word I say? Here's why: You can't handle it. You're from your father, the Devil, and all you want to do is please him. He was a killer from the very start. He couldn't stand the truth because there wasn't a shred of truth in him. When the Liar speaks, he makes it up out of his lying nature and fills the world with lies. I arrive on the scene, tell you the plain truth, and you refuse to have a thing to do with me. Can any one of you convict me of a single misleading word, a single sinful act? But if I'm telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone on God's side listens to God's words. This is why you're not listening—because you're not on God's side."

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus is teaching us that when we're children of God, we learn to behave like our Father. Can you think of any ways that you are like your mom or dad? Any talents, or hobbies, or interests that you have learned from them?
- » **Apply it:** How could you be a child of your Father, God, today? What do you think He is up to in your world?

Weed:

- » How were you a child of your Father today—how did you act like him?
- » When did you forget that you were a child of God today?

Saturday

Till:

Jesus, you are the beginning and the end—you were long, long before the world was created. Everything that exists was made through you! We praise you, Jesus!

Plant:

John 8:47-59 (MSG)

"If God were your father," said Jesus, "you would love me, for I came from God and arrived here. I didn't come on my own. He sent me. Why can't you understand one word I say? Here's why: You can't handle it. You're from your father, the Devil, and all you want to do is please him. He was a killer from the very start. He couldn't stand the truth because there wasn't a shred of truth in him. When the Liar speaks, he makes it up out of his lying nature and fills the world with lies. I arrive on the scene, tell you the plain truth, and you refuse to have a thing to do with me. Can any one of you convict me of a single misleading word, a single sinful act? But if I'm telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone on God's side listens to God's words. This is why you're not listening—because you're not on God's side."

The Jews then said, "That clinches it. We were right all along when we called you a Samaritan and said you were crazy—demon-possessed!"

Jesus said, "I'm not crazy. I simply honor my Father, while you dishonor me. I am not trying to get anything for myself. God intends something gloriously grand here and is making the decisions that will bring it about. I say this with absolute confidence. If

you practice what I'm telling you, you'll never have to look death in the face."

At this point the Jews said, "Now we know you're crazy. Abraham died. The prophets died. And you show up saying, 'If you practice what I'm telling you, you'll never have to face death, not even a taste.' Are you greater than Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you think you are!"

Jesus said, "If I turned the spotlight on myself, it wouldn't amount to anything. But my Father, the same One you say is your Father, put me here at this time and place of splendor. You haven't recognized him in this. But I have. If I, in false modesty, said I didn't know what was going on, I would be as much of a liar as you are. But I do know, and I am doing what he says. Abraham—your 'father'—with jubilant faith looked down the corridors of history and saw my day coming. He saw it and cheered."

The Jews said, "You're not even fifty years old—and Abraham saw you?"

"Believe me," said Jesus, "I am who I am long before Abraham was anything."

That did it—pushed them over the edge. They picked up rocks to throw at him. But Jesus slipped away, getting out of the Temple.

Water:

- » **Create it:** Have kids create a "time line" of any events they know, from world history or Bible history. Don't worry too much about getting it right—just let it be a history brainstorm. Then, have them draw Jesus at every point, and then way before and way after.
- » **Apply it:** How does it make you feel to know that Jesus has always, always existed, and always will? That he will never change, ever?

Weed:

- » What did it mean for you today that Jesus is always the same, forever?

* *Week Five of Lent*

Sunday

Till:

Jesus, your ways aren't our ways. We have such a hard time with self-sacrifice, serving, letting go of things we want even when they aren't good for us. Please help us to trust you more. Help us to release control and follow you, even in hard situations.

Plant:

Mark 8:31—9:1 (MSG)

Jesus warned them to keep it quiet, not to breathe a word of it to anyone. He then began explaining things to them: "It is necessary that the Son of Man proceed to an ordeal of suffering, be tried and found guilty by the elders, high priests, and religion scholars, be killed, and after three days rise up alive." He said this simply and clearly so they couldn't miss it.

But Peter grabbed him in protest. Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. "Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works."

Calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

"If any of you are embarrassed over me and the way I'm leading you when you get around your fickle and unfocused friends, know that you'll be an even greater embarrassment to the Son of Man when he arrives in all the splendor of God, his Father, with an army of the holy angels."

Then he drove it home by saying, "This isn't pie in the sky by and by. Some of you who are standing here are going to see it happen, see the kingdom of God arrive in full force."

Additional readings for the fifth Sunday of Lent:

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

Water:

- » **Imagine it:** When Jesus told his disciples that his path was leading to suffering and death, they couldn't believe it! Peter even told Jesus to stop being so gloomy! Why do you think they reacted that way? How do you think you would have reacted?
- » **Enter it:** Jesus' way leads through suffering and loss. We have to follow him there, so that we let go of the things that keep us from God. Can you think of a time when you had to do something hard, that you didn't like, but it turned out to be good for you?
- » **Apply it:** Is there an area in your life where you need to give control to Jesus? What is one small step you could take today?

Weed:

- » What was hard today? How did you feel about it?
 - » Were you able to trust God in that situation? Why or why not?
-

Monday

Till:

Jesus, you are this world's Light—open our eyes! We want to see you! We want to see the truth. Lead us, Jesus!

Plant:

John 9:1-17 (MSG)

Walking down the street, Jesus saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned: this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do. We need to be ener-

getically at work for the One who sent me here, working while the sun shines. When night falls, the workday is over. For as long as I am in the world, there is plenty of light. I am the world's Light."

He said this and then spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "Sent"). The man went and washed—and saw.

Soon the town was buzzing. His relatives and those who year after year had seen him as a blind man begging were saying, "Why, isn't this the man we knew, who sat here and begged?"

Others said, "It's him all right!"

But others objected, "It's not the same man at all. It just looks like him."

He said, "It's me, the very one."

They said, "How did your eyes get opened?"

"A man named Jesus made a paste and rubbed it on my eyes and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' I did what he said. When I washed, I saw."

"So where is he?"

"I don't know."

They marched the man to the Pharisees. This day when Jesus made the paste and healed his blindness was the Sabbath. The Pharisees grilled him again on how he had come to see. He said, "He put a clay paste on my eyes, and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "Obviously, this man can't be from God. He doesn't keep the Sabbath."

Others countered, "How can a bad man do miraculous, God-revealing things like this?" There was a split in their ranks.

They came back at the blind man, "You're the expert. He opened your eyes. What do you say about him?"

He said, "He is a prophet."

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Draw a scene from today's story.
- » **Apply it:** Jesus opens eyes—not only can he heal a blind man, but he can help us see the world the right way. Where do you need fresh eyes to love God and people today?

Weed:

- » Did you ask Jesus for fresh eyes today?
 - » What did you see differently?
-

Tuesday

Till:

Jesus, help us to see what we see—to accept what you show us, when you show up! Help us to see you and believe.

Plant:

John 9:18-41 (MSG)

The Jews didn't believe it, didn't believe the man was blind to begin with. So they called the parents of the man now bright-eyed with sight. They asked them, "Is this your son, the one you say was born blind? So how is it that he now sees?"

His parents said, "We know he is our son, and we know he was born blind. But we don't know how he came to see—haven't a clue about who opened his eyes. Why don't you ask him? He's a grown man and can speak for himself." (His parents were talking like this because they were intimidated by the Jewish leaders, who had already decided that anyone who took a stand that this was the Messiah would be kicked out of the meeting place. That's why his parents said, "Ask him. He's a grown man.")

They called the man back a second time—the man who had been blind— and told him, "Give credit to God. We know this man is an impostor."

He replied, "I know nothing about that one way or the other. But I know one thing for sure: I was blind . . . I now see."

They said, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

"I've told you over and over and you haven't listened. Why do you want to hear it again? Are you so eager to become his disciples?"

With that they jumped all over him. "You might be a disciple of that man, but we're disciples of Moses. We know for sure that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this man even comes from."

The man replied, "This is amazing! You claim to know nothing about him, but the fact is, he opened my eyes! It's well known that God isn't at the beck and call of sinners, but listens carefully to anyone who lives in reverence and does his will. That someone

opened the eyes of a man born blind has never been heard of—ever. If this man didn't come from God, he wouldn't be able to do anything."

They said, "You're nothing but dirt! How dare you take that tone with us!" Then they threw him out in the street.

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and went and found him. He asked him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

The man said, "Point him out to me, sir, so that I can believe in him."

Jesus said, "You're looking right at him. Don't you recognize my voice?"

"Master, I believe," the man said, and worshiped him.

Jesus then said, "I came into the world to bring everything into the clear light of day, making all the distinctions clear, so that those who have never seen will see, and those who have made a great pretense of seeing will be exposed as blind."

Some Pharisees overheard him and said, "Does that mean you're calling us blind?"

Jesus said, "If you were really blind, you would be blameless, but since you claim to see everything so well, you're accountable for every fault and failure."

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Why do you think the Pharisees didn't want to believe in Jesus' miracle? Why does Jesus call them blind?
- » **Apply it:** Are there times you'd rather ignore God? Why?

Weed:

- » Where did you see God today?
- » Was there a time when you ignored God today? Let's ask for forgiveness.

Wednesday

Till:

Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd! Help us to listen for your voice, and recognize you when you call us.

Plant:

John 10:1-18 (MSG)

"Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it."

Jesus told this simple story, but they had no idea what he was talking about. So he tried again. "I'll be explicit, then. I am the Gate for the sheep. All those others are up to no good—sheep stealers, every one of them. But the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of.

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary. A hired man is not a real shepherd. The sheep mean nothing to him. He sees a wolf come and runs for it, leaving the sheep to be ravaged and scattered by the wolf. He's only in it for the money. The sheep don't matter to him.

"I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own sheep and my own sheep know me. In the same way, the Father knows me and I know the Father. I put the sheep before myself, sacrificing myself if necessary. You need to know that I have other sheep in addition to those in this pen. I need to gather and bring them, too. They'll also recognize my voice. Then it will be one flock, one Shepherd. This is why the Father loves me: because I freely lay down my life. And so I am free to take it up again. No one takes it from me. I lay it down of my own free will. I have the right to lay it down; I also have the right to take it up again. I received this authority personally from my Father."

Water:

- » **Create it:** Draw a picture, or make a silly putty sculpture, of Jesus the Good Shepherd, with a sheep.
- » **Imagine it:** Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd, which means he takes care of his sheep—us! He says his sheep know His voice. What do you think Jesus' voice might sound like? How can you listen for Him today?

Weed:

- » Did you listen for Jesus today?

» What did He say?

Thursday

Till:

Jesus, you are God! What a wonderful, amazing truth—God in the flesh, God with us! There is no one like you, Jesus! We worship you, our God and King!

Plant:

John 10:19-42 (MSG)

This kind of talk caused another split in the Jewish ranks. A lot of them were saying, "He's crazy, a maniac—out of his head completely. Why bother listening to him?" But others weren't so sure: "These aren't the words of a crazy man. Can a 'maniac' open blind eyes?"

They were celebrating Hanukkah just then in Jerusalem. It was winter. Jesus was strolling in the Temple across Solomon's Porch. The Jews, circling him, said, "How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you're the Messiah, tell us straight out."

Jesus answered, "I told you, but you don't believe. Everything I have done has been authorized by my Father, actions that speak louder than words. You don't believe because you're not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them real and eternal life. They are protected from the Destroyer for good. No one can steal them from out of my hand. The Father who put them under my care is so much greater than the Destroyer and Thief. No one could ever get them away from him. I and the Father are one heart and mind."

Again the Jews picked up rocks to throw at him. Jesus said, "I have made a present to you from the Father of a great many good actions. For which of these acts do you stone me?"

The Jews said, "We're not stoning you for anything good you did, but for what you said—this blasphemy of calling yourself God."

Jesus said, "I'm only quoting your inspired Scriptures, where God said, 'I tell you—you are gods.' If God called your ancestors 'gods'—and Scripture doesn't lie—why do you yell, 'Blasphemer! Blasphemer!' at the unique One the Father consecrated and sent into the world, just because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I don't do the things my Father does, well and good; don't believe me. But if I am doing them, put aside for a moment what you hear me say about myself and just take the evidence of the ac-

tions that are right before your eyes. Then perhaps things will come together for you, and you'll see that not only are we doing the same thing, we are the same—Father and Son. He is in me; I am in him."

They tried yet again to arrest him, but he slipped through their fingers. He went back across the Jordan to the place where John first baptized, and stayed there. A lot of people followed him over. They were saying, "John did no miracles, but everything he said about this man has come true." Many believed in him then and there.

Water:

- » **Enter it:** Jesus tells us that if we will just look at what he does, we'll see that He really is God! What are some things Jesus did that tell you He is more than just a good teacher?
- » **Celebrate it:** Worship Jesus, our God! Put on some worship music and dance, sing, play, and celebrate Him!
- » **Apply it:** Jesus is Lord and God! How can you make a big deal about Jesus today?

Weed:

- » Where did you make a big deal about Jesus today?
 - » What do you love best about Jesus today?
-

Friday

Till:

Jesus, you are the Resurrection and Life. Help us put our faith in you when it seems everything we love and hope for, falls apart. You are still in control.

Plant:

John 11:1-27 (MSG)

A man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. This was the same Mary who massaged the Lord's feet with aromatic oils and then wiped them with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Master, the one you love so very much is sick."

When Jesus got the message, he said, "This sickness is not fatal. It will become an oc-

casation to show God's glory by glorifying God's Son."

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, but oddly, when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed on where he was for two more days. After the two days, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

They said, "Rabbi, you can't do that. The Jews are out to kill you, and you're going back?"

Jesus replied, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in daylight doesn't stumble because there's plenty of light from the sun. Walking at night, he might very well stumble because he can't see where he's going."

He said these things, and then announced, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going to wake him up."

The disciples said, "Master, if he's gone to sleep, he'll get a good rest and wake up feeling fine." Jesus was talking about death, while his disciples thought he was talking about taking a nap.

Then Jesus became explicit: "Lazarus died. And I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there. You're about to be given new grounds for believing. Now let's go to him."

That's when Thomas, the one called the Twin, said to his companions, "Come along. We might as well die with him."

When Jesus finally got there, he found Lazarus already four days dead. Bethany was near Jerusalem, only a couple of miles away, and many of the Jews were visiting Martha and Mary, sympathizing with them over their brother. Martha heard Jesus was coming and went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house.

Martha said, "Master, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you."

Jesus said, "Your brother will be raised up."

Martha replied, "I know that he will be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time."

"You don't have to wait for the End. I am, right now, Resurrection and Life. The one who believes in me, even though he or she dies, will live. And everyone who lives believing in me does not ultimately die at all. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Master. All along I have believed that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who comes into the world."

Water:

- » **Enter it:** How do you think Mary and Martha felt when they found out their brother died? Do you think they wondered why Jesus didn't come sooner?

- » **Apply it:** This week's story is an echo of next Friday, Good Friday, when we'll remember Jesus' death on the cross. Because God can bring new life even in death, sometimes he allows us to experience sadness so he can create joy out of it. Can you name a time when you were very sad? What came out of that?

Weed:

- » As we come near to the end of Lent, what have you learned from praying, giving, and fasting?
-

Saturday

Till:

It's a miracle! Life out of death! Restored hopes and dreams! Jesus, with you, every hurt is transformed into a joy! Help us believe.

Plant:

John 11:28-44 (MSG)

After saying this, she went to her sister Mary and whispered in her ear, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you."

The moment she heard that, she jumped up and ran out to him. Jesus had not yet entered the town but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When her sympathizing Jewish friends saw Mary run off, they followed her, thinking she was on her way to the tomb to weep there. Mary came to where Jesus was waiting and fell at his feet, saying, "Master, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. He said, "Where did you put him?"

"Master, come and see," they said. Now Jesus wept.

The Jews said, "Look how deeply he loved him."

Others among them said, "Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man."

Then Jesus, the anger again welling up within him, arrived at the tomb. It was a simple cave in the hillside with a slab of stone laid against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone."

The sister of the dead man, Martha, said, "Master, by this time there's a stench. He's

been dead four days!"

Jesus looked her in the eye. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

Then, to the others, "Go ahead, take away the stone."

They removed the stone. Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and prayed, "Father, I'm grateful that you have listened to me. I know you always do listen, but on account of this crowd standing here I've spoken so that they might believe that you sent me."

Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And he came out, a cadaver, wrapped from head to toe, and with a kerchief over his face.

Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him loose."

Water:

- » **Create it:** Draw or paint the scene of Lazarus coming back to life! How do his friends and family feel?
- » **Apply it:** Jesus has power to turn the darkest situations into new and abundant life! Where is one area you need Him to bring new hope? How would you ask Jesus for it?

Weed:

- » Where did you ask Jesus for new hope today?
- » How did it feel to turn to him in a hard situation?



Holy Week

Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday and ends just as we launch into the celebration of Easter-tide. Holy Week places the paradox of Lent, of death to life, under the microscope. We take a good look, with our hearts and minds, at how Jesus himself lived this paradox. Again as parents we wonder how to explain this Christian mystery, of death to life, to our children. That is the blessing of ritual. The small rituals already set in place during Lent and each additional activity for Holy Week have a miraculous capacity to impart understanding to children. Year after year these rituals teach the paradox of death to life. Their theology will not be complex, but children will know that from death, comes life.

When children are young they relate best to the life part of the paradox. Spring is the breaking from the death of Winter to the life of Spring. Constantly pointing out all the signs of Spring is a powerful reminder.

Older children can understand and participate in the death to life paradox. Always bring discussions back to the fact that, “Life wins.” Older children can benefit and will mature from time spent in death to their own wills, and a sincere, thoughtful meditation on the last week of Christ where he moved from life, to death, and back to life everlasting.

Palm Sunday

Seasonal Fun:

Holy Week is split into two parts. Palm Sunday through Holy Wednesday do not take us into the suffering of Jesus yet; instead we look ahead to what is worth dying for. The first part is full of preparation and confirmation. As Joan Chittister says in her book *The Liturgical Year*, “These first days of Holy Week confirm: there are some things worth living for, even if we find ourselves having to die for them as well.”

- » **Welcome home party:** Create a welcome banner for Jesus. Read the “Triumphant Entry” of Jesus as a family. Enjoy special snacks, invite the neighbors.
- » **Create a Blessing Banner:** Part of looking ahead from death to life is found in looking ahead from Winter to Spring. Use poster board and construction paper to make a flower garden; on each the petals of the flowers, write a blessing, something worth living for.

Use the poster as a reminder all during Holy Week that life triumphs over death.

Till:

We thank you Jesus for showing us how to live a humble and good life. Help us today to prepare for your coming. Show us how to celebrate your arrival!

Plant:

Matt. 21:1-16 (MSG)

When they neared Jerusalem, having arrived at Bethphage on Mount Olives, Jesus sent two disciples with these instructions: "Go over to the village across from you. You'll find a donkey tethered there, her colt with her. Untie her and bring them to me. If anyone asks what you're doing, say, 'The Master needs them!' He will send them with you."

This is the full story of what was sketched earlier by the prophet:

Tell Zion's daughter,
"Look, your king's on his way,
poised and ready, mounted
On a donkey, on a colt,
foal of a pack animal."

The disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus mounted. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and threw them down as a welcome mat. Crowds went ahead and crowds followed, all of them calling out, "Hosanna to David's son!" "Blessed is he who comes in God's name!" "Hosanna in highest heaven!"

As he made his entrance into Jerusalem, the whole city was shaken. Unnerved, people were asking, "What's going on here? Who is this?"

The parade crowd answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, the one from Nazareth in Galilee."

Additional reading for Palm Sunday:

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Water:

» How can we celebrate the arrival of Jesus in our lives?

- » How can we celebrate every day, not just Palm Sunday?

Weed:

- » How did you celebrate today?
- » How can you carry this celebration through to Good Friday?

Holy Monday

Seasonal Fun:

- » Holy Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are preparation days. These are the days to get out the good china, go to the grocery store, purchase the Easter Sunday clothes, plan the menu, buy Easter Baskets. There will be little time for preparations once Thursday comes, so this is the time.
- » Not long ago it was customary for people to purchase special Easter clothing, and make extra special arrangements with much care. Today our society has become lax about those things and generally it's a good idea, but part of the weight of Easter is in the preparation. So go ahead unleash your inner planner.
- » Invite the children to help wash the good china. Let the children help pick out their Easter clothes. Invite the whole family to plan the Easter menu. Little children can choose and create decorations.
- » Make traditional Easter Eggs. Make Confetti Eggs. Poke a tiny hole in both ends of the egg, then blow out the insides. Poke tiny confetti inside, with a note that says, "Jesus Lives." Take to church on Easter and spread the celebration.

Till:

Hosanna! Blessed are you who comes in the name of the Lord. We worship you Son of God. We want to worship you all day long!

Plant:

John 12:9-19 (MSG)

Word got out among the Jews that he was back in town. The people came to take a look, not only at Jesus but also at Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead. So the high priests plotted to kill Lazarus because so many of the Jews were going over and

believing in Jesus on account of him.

The next day the huge crowd that had arrived for the Feast heard that Jesus was entering Jerusalem. They broke off palm branches and went out to meet him. And they cheered:

Hosanna!

Blessed is he who comes in God's name!

Yes! The King of Israel!

Jesus got a young donkey and rode it, just as the Scripture has it:

No fear, Daughter Zion:

See how your king comes,
riding a donkey's colt.

The disciples didn't notice the fulfillment of many Scriptures at the time, but after Jesus was glorified, they remembered that what was written about him matched what was done to him.

The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, was there giving eyewitness accounts. It was because they had spread the word of this latest God-sign that the crowd swelled to a welcoming parade. The Pharisees took one look and threw up their hands: "It's out of control. The world's in a stampede after him."

Additional readings for Monday of Holy Week:

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Draw the procession of people celebrating Jesus!
- » **Apply it:** Where can you invite Jesus to enter into your life today?

Weed:

- » Where did you invite Jesus into your life today?
- » When should you have invited Jesus in today?

Holy Tuesday

Till:

Jesus, when it looks to us like our hopes are dead and buried, you are preparing to grow new life, overflowing abundance many times over! Help us to trust you.

Plant:

John 12:20-26 (MSG)

There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: "Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, "Time's up. The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.

"If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.

Additional readings for Tuesday of Holy Week:

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Water:

- » **Create it:** As Easter draws close, Spring is usually arriving with flowers! Have children gather some wild-flowers or blossoms from trees and make a bouquet.
- » Continue with preparations for Easter (see Seasonal Fun on Holy Monday).

Weed:

- » Where did you see God bringing joy today?

Holy Wednesday

Till:

God, you have made your name known and loved through all the world, because of Jesus! Help us to honor you today.

Plant:

John 12:27-36 (MSG)

"Right now I am storm-tossed. And what am I going to say? 'Father, get me out of this'? No, this is why I came in the first place. I'll say, 'Father, put your glory on display.'"

A voice came out of the sky: "I have glorified it, and I'll glorify it again."

The listening crowd said, "Thunder!"

Others said, "An angel spoke to him!"

Jesus said, "The voice didn't come for me but for you. At this moment the world is in crisis. Now Satan, the ruler of this world, will be thrown out. And I, as I am lifted up from the earth, will attract everyone to me and gather them around me." He put it this way to show how he was going to be put to death.

Voices from the crowd answered, "We heard from God's Law that the Messiah lasts forever. How can it be necessary, as you put it, that the Son of Man 'be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?"

Jesus said, "For a brief time still, the light is among you. Walk by the light you have so darkness doesn't destroy you. If you walk in darkness, you don't know where you're going. As you have the light, believe in the light. Then the light will be within you, and shining through your lives. You'll be children of light."

Jesus said all this, and then went into hiding. All these God-signs he had given them and they still didn't get it, still wouldn't trust him. This proved that the prophet Isaiah was right:

God, who believed what we preached?

Who recognized God's arm, outstretched and ready to act?

First they wouldn't believe, then they couldn't—again, just as Isaiah said:

Their eyes are blinded,

their hearts are hardened,

So that they wouldn't see with their eyes

and perceive with their hearts,
And turn to me, God,
so I could heal them.

Additional readings for Wednesday of Holy Week:
Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3

Water:

- » **Draw it:** Choose your favorite scene from today's reading and draw it.
- » Continue with preparations for Easter (see Seasonal Fun on Holy Monday).

Weed:

- » How was God patient with you today?
- » Where do you need to listen to Jesus more clearly? How can you do that?

Maundy Thursday

Seasonal Fun:

Maundy Thursday begins the second part of Holy Week, and with it comes a shift in focus. Its name comes from the Last Supper, when Jesus declares, "A new commandment [*mandatum*, in Latin] I give to you: love one another."

At this point in Holy Week, we no longer prepare; we are instead immersed. We don't think to the future, we live in the now. We slow and quiet our lives and our homes so that we can focus on Jesus.

- » Remove everything but the cross from the Family Altar.
- » Turn the TV off and keep it off until Sunday. If you can, do the same for computers and unnecessary phones.
- » Read the account of the Last Supper together as a family.
- » Begin dinner with the "highest ranking" family member washing everyone's hands. (You can do feet if you want; in our culture washing hands before dinner is customary.)
- » Attend a Seder meal. Ask around, there are often people in the community who like to include others.

Till:

Jesus thank you for your body and your blood that you gave to us. Help us to remember that when we eat and drink of you, we will never hunger or thirst again.

Plant:

John 13:1-35 (MSG)

Just before the Passover Feast, Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world to go to the Father. Having loved his dear companions, he continued to love them right to the end. It was suppertime. The Devil by now had Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot, firmly in his grip, all set for the betrayal.

Jesus knew that the Father had put him in complete charge of everything, that he came from God and was on his way back to God. So he got up from the supper table, set aside his robe, and put on an apron. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, drying them with his apron. When he got to Simon Peter, Peter said, "Master, you wash my feet?"

Jesus answered, "You don't understand now what I'm doing, but it will be clear enough to you later."

Peter persisted, "You're not going to wash my feet—ever!"

Jesus said, "If I don't wash you, you can't be part of what I'm doing."

"Master!" said Peter. "Not only my feet, then. Wash my hands! Wash my head!"

Jesus said, "If you've had a bath in the morning, you only need your feet washed now and you're clean from head to toe. My concern, you understand, is holiness, not hygiene. So now you're clean. But not every one of you." (He knew who was betraying him. That's why he said, "Not every one of you.") After he had finished washing their feet, he took his robe, put it back on, and went back to his place at the table.

Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.

"I'm not including all of you in this. I know precisely whom I've selected, so as not to interfere with the fulfillment of this Scripture:

The one who ate bread at my table turned on his heel against me.

"I'm telling you all this ahead of time so that when it happens you will believe that I am who I say I am. Make sure you get this right: Receiving someone I send is the same as receiving me, just as receiving me is the same as receiving the One who sent

me."

After he said these things, Jesus became visibly upset, and then he told them why. "One of you is going to betray me."

The disciples looked around at one another, wondering who on earth he was talking about. One of the disciples, the one Jesus loved dearly, was reclining against him, his head on his shoulder. Peter motioned to him to ask who Jesus might be talking about. So, being the closest, he said, "Master, who?"

Jesus said, "The one to whom I give this crust of bread after I've dipped it." Then he dipped the crust and gave it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. As soon as the bread was in his hand, Satan entered him.

"What you must do," said Jesus, "do. Do it and get it over with."

No one around the supper table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that since Judas was their treasurer, Jesus was telling him to buy what they needed for the Feast, or that he should give something to the poor.

Judas, with the piece of bread, left. It was night.

When he had left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is seen for who he is, and God seen for who he is in him. The moment God is seen in him, God's glory will be on display. In glorifying him, he himself is glorified—glory all around!

"Children, I am with you for only a short time longer. You are going to look high and low for me. But just as I told the Jews, I'm telling you: 'Where I go, you are not able to come.'

"Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other."

Additional readings for Maundy Thursday:

Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Water:

- » How can we receive the body of Jesus today?
- » How can we share the body of Jesus today?

Weed:

- » Where did you share the body of Jesus today?
- » When did you need the body of Jesus today?

Good Friday

Seasonal Fun:

Good Friday is the saddest day of the church year. It is the day that hope dies. We are tempted to let our minds skip to Sunday, but resist. Easter can only be birthed from death. So we as a family sit in our sadness on this day. We lean into the pain and suffering of Jesus. On this day our faith is tried. Could we—would we follow Jesus to the cross? Is our love and devotion to him strong enough to walk with him through the valley of the shadow of death?

- » Read the account of the crucifixion together as a family.
- » Invite the family to wear black to signify mourning for the dead Christ.
- » If your family doesn't normally make the sign of the cross, try it today. Begin at the head, move down to the chest, over to one shoulder and then cross to the next. Make it slowly, and carefully each time you pray today. As you make the sign think about, and explain to children that Jesus died for all of us, our minds, our hearts, and our bodies. When we make the sign of the cross we give all of ourselves to God, we accept the salvation of the cross for all the parts of us, and we also remember that all parts of us must die in order to live.
- » Place pictures of the "stations of the cross" on the Family Altar encourage family member to visit it a least once on this day.

Till:

We can't say, "Thank you," enough for dying for us. Help us Lord Jesus, give us the strength, the love, the devotion, to follow you wherever you may lead. We cannot do it ourselves.

Plant:

John 19:19-42 (MSG)

They took Jesus away. Carrying his cross, Jesus went out to the place called Skull Hill (the name in Hebrew is Golgotha), where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on each side, Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote a sign and had it placed on the cross. It read:

jesus the nazarene

the king of the jews.

Many of the Jews read the sign because the place where Jesus was crucified was right next to the city. It was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The Jewish high priests objected. "Don't write," they said to Pilate, "'The King of the Jews.' Make it, 'This man said, 'I am the King of the Jews.'"

Pilate said, "What I've written, I've written."

When they crucified him, the Roman soldiers took his clothes and divided them up four ways, to each soldier a fourth. But his robe was seamless, a single piece of weaving, so they said to each other, "Let's not tear it up. Let's throw dice to see who gets it." This confirmed the Scripture that said, "They divided up my clothes among them and threw dice for my coat." (The soldiers While the soldiers were looking after themselves, Jesus' mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother.

Jesus, seeing that everything had been completed so that the Scripture record might also be complete, then said, "I'm thirsty."

A jug of sour wine was standing by. Someone put a sponge soaked with the wine on a javelin and lifted it to his mouth. After he took the wine, Jesus said, "It's done . . . complete." Bowing his head, he offered up his spirit.

Then the Jews, since it was the day of Sabbath preparation, and so the bodies wouldn't stay on the crosses over the Sabbath (it was a high holy day that year), petitioned Pilate that their legs be broken to speed death, and the bodies taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first man crucified with Jesus, and then the other. When they got to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. One of the soldiers stabbed him in the side with his spear. Blood and water gushed out.

The eyewitness to these things has presented an accurate report. He saw it himself and is telling the truth so that you, also, will believe.

These things that happened confirmed the Scripture, "Not a bone in his body was broken," and the other Scripture that reads, "They will stare at the one they pierced."

After all this, Joseph of Arimathea (he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, because he was intimidated by the Jews) petitioned Pilate to take the body of Jesus. Pilate gave permission. So Joseph came and took the body.

Nicodemus, who had first come to Jesus at night, came now in broad daylight carrying a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. They took Jesus' body and, following the Jewish burial custom, wrapped it in linen with the spices. There was a garden near the place he was crucified, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been placed. So, because it was Sabbath preparation for the Jews and the tomb was convenient, they placed Jesus in it.

Additional readings for Good Friday:

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25

- » What was the most difficult thing to imagine about today's reading?
- » Which person do you most identify with?

Weed:

- » When did you make the sign of the cross today? What did it mean to you?
 - » Where would be the most difficult place Jesus could lead you? How can you prepare to follow him anywhere?
-

Holy Saturday

We have no reading on Holy Saturday. It is a day where the silence of God is deafening. It's a day where we go ahead and give up. Give up striving for more or better. The struggle to die to ourselves we have practiced all through Lent, finally gets its death blow on this day. Here the paradox comes into full bloom, in the silence and solitude of a dead Christ, and a hope lost. Don't try to skate through Holy Saturday with distractions, or false hope. The only way of Eastertide life is through this "dark night of the soul."

- » Children especially will feel the sadness and emptiness of this day. They may even cry. Let them and cry with them. They cannot verbal express what they know to be true. Their Jesus has died and they are sad, they mourn.
- » Tell the children about how people were buried long ago. Tell them how Mary and Martha would have gathered up strips of cloth and herbs and oil to prepare Jesus body to be buried. Gather a basket with strips of cloth, (or let them unwind a roll of toilet paper) oil or perfume, and some herbs.
- » Use a baby doll, toilet paper, and a cardboard box. Invite the children imagine that the doll is Jesus, have them help you wrap the body and put it in the box.

The season of Easter will be available in the next booklet. You will find it online at www.fbcslo.org no later than April 17, or it will be available where you received this booklet.





Table of Dates for the Church Year

Year	Advent	Lent	Holy Week	Easter	Pentecost
2010-11	Nov 28	Mar 9	April 17	April 24	June 12
2011-12	Nov 27	Feb 22	April 1	April 8	May 27
2012-13	Dec 2	Feb 13	March 24	March 31	May 19
2013-14	Dec 1	Mar 5	April 13	April 20	June 8
2014-15	Nov 30	Feb 18	March 29	April 5	May 24
2015-16	Nov 29	Feb 10	March 20	March 27	May 15
2016-17	Nov 27	Mar 1	April 9	April 16	June 4
2017-18	Dec 3	Feb 14	March 25	April 1	May 20
2018-19	Dec 2	Mar 6	April 14	April 21	June 9
2019-20	Dec 1	Feb 26	April 5	April 12	May 31
2020-21	Nov 29	Feb 17	March 28	April 4	May 23
2021-22	Nov 28	Mar 2	April 10	April 17	Jun 5
2022-23	Nov 27	Feb 22	April 2	April 9	May 28
2023-24	Dec 3	Feb 14	March 24	March 31	May 19
2024-25	Dec 1	Mar 5	April 13	April 20	Jun 8
2025-26	Nov 30	Feb 18	March 29	April 5	May 24
2026-27	Nov 29	Feb 10	March 21	March 28	May 16
2027-28	Nov 28	Mar 1	April 9	April 16	Jun 4
2028-29	Dec 3	Feb 14	March 25	April 1	May 27



☘ Contributors



Lacy Borgo

Lacy Finn Borgo writes for the spiritual formation of children because she has children and she likes them. She has a Master's Degree in Education from The State University of New York Geneseo. She has taught in both public and private schools in Texas, New York, Colorado, and Kazakhstan. Lacy has written three picture books—*Big Mama's Baby*, *Day and Night*, and *The Mighty Hurricane*. She has worked with Houghton Mifflin and McGraw Hill. Lacy lives in Colorado where she tends both the physical and spiritual gardens of her family.



Ben Barczy

Ben Barczy serves as Pastor of Spiritual Formation at First Baptist Church in San Luis Obispo, CA. He is a graduate of California Polytechnic in San Luis Obispo, where he studied Philosophy. Ben loves teaching small groups and classes about spiritual formation, and enjoys living a semi-monastic life ordered by the rhythms of Daily Prayer, regular solitude, and lots of really good conversations at amazing local coffeeshops.

