

Lent 2012

Living In Hope

Perseverance

Moving On

Change

Choices

Growth

Betrayal

Resurrection

Living In Hope

Welcome. This series is designed to be used in small faith-sharing groups, for individual and family reflection or as a parish Lenten journey. Some weeks the scripture passage offered for reflection in this guide may not be the same passage as that of the Sunday readings. For those weeks I have chosen to offer an alternative passage for reflection and discussion. However, the Sunday readings and the reflection passages are always connected to the ***theme of the week*** which is drawn from the Sunday readings. This guide will offer a short explanation of that connection and also suggest a related reflection and discussion questions from my book ***Come Next Spring --- Scripture Reflections of Promise and Hope***.

Walk With Us. Several parishes and hundreds of people across the country have elected to use this series during Lent this year. We invite you to walk with us on our Lenten journey.

As a child my siblings and I would wait with a clock in one hand and a candy bar in the other for the “end of Lent”. Perhaps many of us still eagerly await the end of the Lenten season so we can again engage in whatever element of our life we have “given up for Lent”. But Lent isn’t about endings – it’s about beginnings. It’s about springtime; it’s about turning soil, planting seeds, and experiencing new growth. Every farmer instinctively knows that soil must first be turned and seeds planted before new life can begin. Every farmer also knows that something must die to bring forth that new life. And so it is with the winter experiences of our lives: they, too, are a time of preparation – a time for listening, a time for planting, and a time for letting go.

Some of the reflections in this series may be difficult for you; they may take you places you’d rather not go. Still, we invite you to walk with us this Lenten Season and to listen. Listen for God’s voice as you clear out the underbrush that dampens your spirit; listen for God’s call as you prune the branches of self-confidence and self-doubt. Listen for God’s message in the songs of the returning robins, and in the sudden shower of spring rains.

Listen for God’s invitation to a new springtime for your spirit.

(As an introduction for this series please read, “***Listen***” pages 6—8 in ***Come Next Spring --- Scripture Reflections of Promise and Hope***) **

**** This series is based on Jim Welter’s book “*Come Next Spring --- Scripture Reflections of Promise and Hope*” which is available at www.ascendingview.com (You may print out an order form on the site and order by mail if you choose).**

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 1: Perseverance

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Genesis 9: 8--15

Mark 1:12--15

- D. Theme: Perseverance

In our first reading Noah and his family exit the Ark. They have persevered forty days of raging flood waters and now God places a rainbow in the sky as a sign of his covenant.

In the gospel Jesus *is* the sign of the new covenant, as he perseveres against temptation in the desert for forty days. If we understand that Jesus was fully human and faced the same temptations in life that we do – if we realize that he had no “special advantage” and (as scripture shows) couldn't simply play his “God card” every time he got into trouble – then we can learn something from his life. Rather than thinking of him as “above” us, we can think of him as *among* us. Rather than thinking he could not fail and being dismissive when he is tempted, we can instead ask how he persevered and resisted temptation and we can seek the source of his strength.

The baptism of Jesus in Luke's gospel (Lk 3:21f) takes place just before his temptation in the desert (Lk 4:1f), and the two events cannot be separated. The affirmation Jesus hears at his baptism – “*You are my beloved son*” – provides him with a sense of identity and gives him the strength to resist the temptations that are to come.

So, it is through the water of our own baptism, and in the flood of God's grace that we can find the strength to persevere, and to walk forth and believe in the gospel.

- E. Faith Sharing. ***Come Next Spring*** reflection, ***Walk Forth*** pages 147—151 or ***Hand on the Plow***, pages 91—95. (Alternate reflections are offered for those who have previously used this series.)
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 2: Moving On

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Genesis 22:1--18
Mark 9:2--10

- D. Theme: Moving On

Both Abraham and the apostles have a mountain-top experience in today's readings. Abraham moves from an image of a distant and violent God who demands sacrifice, into the warmth of a faithful and loving Father. On the mountain, the Apostles are given a glimpse of the glory that is to come and they bask in the warmth of the revelation that Jesus "*Is my Beloved Son.*"

As a Christian I want to be someone who never gets too comfortable in this world. I too want to be one who is open to new images and new experiences. I want to be willing to walk into situations of uncertainty and darkness, and light a candle. I want to be able to move intellectually, spiritually, and even physically, if necessary, and embrace each new experience. I want to be a person who is free enough to admit when I am wrong, and to grow and learn and change. I want to be like a child exploring the world and living in the joy of discovery.

All these things I want. But, like Abraham and like Peter, when I find a place that I like, a place where I feel comfortable, alive, accepted and loved, I want to stay there. And I pray with Peter: "*Lord, It's good for us to be here. Let me build three tents*" But Jesus reminds us that we can't stay in our comfort zone, we can't stay in a world where it is nice and safe. As Christians we must move on -- we must go back down the mountain!

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Moving On* pages 85—87
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 3: Change

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Exodus 20: 1--17
John 2:13--25

D. Theme: Change

In our first reading, the chosen people are asked to change the way they are living by obeying a new set of laws – the ten commandments.

Change is difficult for most people. When it comes to things centered on religion or tradition, there is even more resistance. Church humor captures that attitude: “How many parishioners does it take to change a light bulb? “Change?! My grandfather donated that light bulb to the church!”

I told my light bulb story one evening, when my wife and I were talking about how difficult it is for most people to accept change. “*You have to leave Indianapolis to get to Cincinnati,*” she responded. I think she missed the punch line, but her point is well taken: you have to leave where you *are* to get to where you're *going*.

With physical change, no one questions such a simple principle. But in emotional or psychological change, it's not as obvious or as easy. You can't cling to your fears *and* trust in God. You can't harbor resentment *and* be forgiven. You can't be selfish *and* love freely. You can't seek to control everything *and* be open to the Spirit. You can't serve God *and* money. You must let go of one in order to embrace the other. You have to leave Indianapolis to get to Cincinnati!

Jesus dramatizes the need for change by over turning the tables of the money lenders and driving them out of the temple. St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians that, “*we* are God's temple”. So, if Jesus entered *your* temple what tables would he over turn, and who or what would he drive out?

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Turning the Tables* pages 79--81
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 4: Choices

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

2 Chronicles 36:14--23
John 3:14--21

- D. Theme: Choices

In our first reading, the Israelites make a choice. They adopt the values of the pagan world in which they live and thereby lose their identity as a people. Consequently, they are conquered by their enemies and sent into exile. Years later they were given another choice -- to stay in exile or to return home and rebuild their lives.

In today's gospel, Jesus evokes the image of Moses in the desert, again offering the Israelites a choice: "*Look at that which is lifted up – and you will live*" (Numbers 21:9). Jesus offers Nicodemus a similar choice: Look at the one who is lifted up! Look at the Light! "*Believe and be saved*"! Nicodemus can choose to continue living in the darkness of his own obsession with the law, or he can let go of everything he *knows* about salvation -- and embark on a new journey.

Being a Christian is a lifelong journey to the center of our very self. It is the road less traveled. It is a fearful, uncertain, and sometimes painful journey. But, if we choose to live in the light, we must let go of the fears that enslave us, the routines that comfort us, and the addictions that bind us. We must not only give up our sins and offenses, but our certainties as well. We must go to Moriah – to the desert, to the mountain – and dare to venture beyond certainty and safety. Like Nicodemus, if we choose the light, we must look again at all that is familiar and comfortable. We must look again at our traditions, our orthodoxy, our rituals and our rules.

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Going to Cleveland* pages 73--75
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 5: Growth

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Jeremiah 31:31--34

John 12:20--33

- D. Theme: Growth

The image of a garden is often used in scripture, beginning in the book of Genesis with the story of creation. In that story we are given a beautiful image of God as one who "comes down" and walks in the garden with Adam. This image reveals to us the intimate relationship God has with his creation. That relationship is reaffirmed in today's first reading: "*I will write my law upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people*".

Every time we witness new life or observe a new season, we see God in his garden. These experiences remind us that we too have been planted, and are growing from death into life. So, we should not be surprised to find Jesus spending his last night talking with his Father -- in a garden.

It is not by accident that the liturgical season of Lent ends in the Spring. The new life of Spring can only come forth if something dies. Lent is not primarily a *penitential* season – it's a *growing* season. Lent challenges us to reflect on what we must allow to die in our own lives, so new life can come forth.

Just as God was with Jesus, on that last night in the garden, so too is he with us as we suffer our doubts, our fears, and our pains of growth. Like that first creation morning, and like that first Easter, God walks in the garden with us and sows the seeds of surprise -- the seeds of new life!

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *A Grain of Wheat* pages 21--23
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 6

Psalm / Passion Sunday: Betrayal

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Isaiah 50:4--7

Mark 14:1--15:47

- D. Theme: Betrayal

Human nature being what it is, Jesus must have known there would be at least one who “wouldn't get it.” He must have known there would be at least one who didn't share his vision. There would be at least one with a hidden agenda. There would be at least one whose own baggage, whose own hurts, did not allow them to trust. There would be at least one whose pain did not allow them to believe in friendship. There would be one who could not understand how much Jesus cared. There would be at least one who could not allow themselves to be vulnerable enough to receive love.

Jesus proclaims, “*One of you will betray me*” --- and we must all leave the room or stand with Peter and deny our shadow-side. We betray our master whenever we refuse to accept Jesus as he is, with his ever-present challenge to the status quo. And we betray our master when we don't love enough, forgive enough or accept others where they are. We betray our master when we try to manipulate God or to somehow compel God to do our bidding. We betray our master when we let fear control our lives.

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *It Was Night* pages 30--32 or *God Falls* pages 175--177 (Alternate reflections are offered for those who have previously used this series.)
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 7

Easter Sunday: Resurrection

- A. Candle Lighting. Display a symbol of this week's theme and share its meaning with the group. Formally open the evening by lighting a candle as you pray the candle lighting prayer found in the back of this guide.
- B. Life Update (15min): What has happened to you this week? Where have you seen God or sensed the movement of the Spirit in your life since you last came together?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Acts 10:34--43

John 20: 1--9

- D. Theme: Resurrection

In our first reading from the book of Acts Peter boldly tells about Jesus and proclaims, "We are witnesses of all He did". In the time of Christ women could not be official witnesses so in today's gospel we see Peter and John running to the tomb to verify what the women had seen -- an empty tomb.

The disciples were as unprepared for the resurrection of Jesus as they were for his death. The empty tomb made them fearful and joyful at the same time. "*Do not be afraid,*" Jesus tells them. Things are still the same, yet everything has changed. Disease and sickness are still with you. Hatred and violence still stalk the night. But, I'm alive. The stone has been rolled away. Live in hope. Do not become paralyzed by doubt and indifference. Remember that I live and I want you to live also. So, plant seeds, bake bread, share meals, make music, take hikes, and welcome strangers. Study, clarify, speak, write; seek truth and healing. *Live in the hope of my resurrection!*

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *I Have Seen the Lord* pages 36--37 or *Stop Holding on to Me* pages 3--5. (Alternate reflections are offered for those who have previously used this series.)
- F. Closing Prayer. Form a circle around your symbol and invite everyone to pray their intentions. Conclude with the Our Father.

Candle Lighting Prayer

Host:

*Lord, may this candle which we now light
be a sacrament of your presence
among us tonight.*

All:

*By the warmth that radiates from this candle
may the Spirit of Wisdom flow
into every part of our time together.*

*By the light of your presence,
may we see you in one another,
in all the things we share,
even in the midst of our differences.*

*By the guidance of your Spirit,
may all things work together for good,
and may all that we discuss be blessed
so that the life we live
will bless those whose lives we touch.*

Host:

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.