

Lent 2010

Living In Hope

Identity

Listening

Repentance

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Forgiveness

Suffering

Resurrection

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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.

** *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). No portion of *Come Next Spring* may be copied without the author’s consent.

Living In Hope

Lenten Week 1: Identity

- 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): Share something about yourself with the group --- family status, length of time in the parish, where you work. What one word identifies you?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Deuteronomy 26:4--10

Luke 4:1--13

- D. Theme: Identity

Story telling and remembering had a different connotation for Israel than it has for us in the Western world. For us, to remember is to do little more than recall past events. But, when Jewish people "remember" they identify with earlier generations as though they had actually taken part in the events of their history.

When *we* remember we think in 'horizontal' time (Greek 'chronos'), that is, we recall something that *has* happened in our history. Jews think in 'vertical' time (Greek 'kairos'). They enter the story and reflect on who they are and what the events mean to them. They don't think so much in terms of what *has* happened as what *is* happening.

In our first reading notice how the author identifies with the story he is telling. The change from third person to first person in verse 6--8 is significant. '*They*' become '*us*' as the distinction between the past and the present is blurred. God's people gain strength from knowing who they are and being one with those who have gone before them --- and who are with them even now.

The baptism of Jesus in Luke's gospel (Lk 3:21f) takes place just before his temptation in the desert (Lk 4:1f) 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 with the Father, and gives him the strength to resist the temptations that are to come.

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *You Are My Beloved* pages 188—191 or *Show Us the Father* pages 39-42. (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: Listening

- 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 past week? Share one thing you want to hear.
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Genesis 15:5 --18

Luke 9:28--36

D. Theme: Listening

In our first reading, Abram listens to an astonishing promise: *“Look to the heavens and count the stars, if you can. So shall your offspring be.”* The story continues: *“Abram believed the Lord and it counted to him as righteousness”* (Gn 15:6). Centuries later St. Paul will argue that it was Abraham's listening and believing (not circumcision) that led to his salvation (Gal 4:28).

In our gospel today Peter, James and John witness the transfiguration of Jesus. They see him in his glory standing with Moses and Elijah. A voice from the clouds says of Jesus: *“This is my son, listen to him”*. The apostles are instructed not to tell anyone what they have seen: *“And the apostles kept silent”*. It seems that God doesn't want the central message of his miracle to be missed: *“Listen to him”*. In other words, it isn't important that you impress others with a flashy story --- just ***“Listen to him”***.

During this Lenten season ***listen!*** God has a message for *you*. Listen as in your youth. Listen with excitement, listen with anticipation, listen without doubting. It is easier for us to accept where we are than it is to listen because listening requires change. Listening to God may require us to go in a new direction. Listening to God may require us to redefine ourselves. Listening to God always requires that we *“go back down the mountain”*--- back into the world in which we live. It is there that we must listen to where the needs of this sinful and broken world are inviting us to go.

- E. Faith Sharing. ***Come Next Spring*** reflection ***Listen*** pages 6—8.
- 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: Repentance

- 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? What one thing in your life would you do differently if you could live your life over again?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Exodus 3:1--15
Luke 13:1--9

D. Theme: Repentance

In our first reading Moses hears God's promise to deliver the chosen people, "*out of the hands of the Egyptians*". In a like manner, if we repent we will be delivered from our sins.

When some senseless tragedy happens or innocent people suffer our natural instinct is to ask 'Why?' The common belief in biblical times was that the afflicted person was being punished for their sins. In John's gospel the disciples asked Jesus: "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" (Jn 9:2) The Pharisees insist that since no tragedy has befallen them, they obviously have not sinned, and are in no need of repentance.

In our gospel today, a tower in Siloam has collapsed and killed eighteen people. Jesus uses that senseless tragedy to challenge the common wisdom of his day when he asks: "*Do you think those eighteen were the only sinners in Jerusalem?*" In other words, if those people were killed because they sinned, then everybody in Jerusalem would be dead! There is no causality. These events are not related, so the fact that you enjoy good fortune does not mean that you are without sin.

Jesus wants us to stop judging other people and to look inside ourselves. Only then can we see our own sins and imperfections. It is the first step to repentance and forgiveness.

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Inside the Cup* pages 207—209 or *Our Father* pages 204—206. (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 4: Unconditional Love

- 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 past week? Share an experience wherein you felt loved without any conditions.
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Joshua 5: 9--12
Luke 15:11--32

- D. Theme: Unconditional Love

In our first reading the Lord removes the last "*reproach of Egypt*" from the chosen people. At last they are free from the stigma of slavery now they are living independently in the fields of the Promised Land. The passage tells us: "*They ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year*". Something new has come to pass!

In our gospel, the Scribes and Pharisees are upset because Jesus is eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus tells the story of the lost son to reveal to them a new understanding of God's love. He wants them to see that his father does not reproach sinners rather he embraces them with unconditional love. It is a concept that is new to the Scribes and Pharisees. It is a concept that is beyond their understanding. It is a concept that is beyond the understanding of the two sons whose story Jesus tells. It is a concept that is beyond the understanding of many of us as well!

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Nothing You Can Do* pages 197--199
- 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: Forgiveness

- 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 in your relationships is forgiveness needed?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Isaiah 43:16--21

John 8: 1--11

- D. Theme: Forgiveness

In the first reading Isaiah announces to the people that just as God released them from slavery in Egypt, he is now releasing them from slavery in Babylon. Isaiah tells them that God will forget the "events of the past" which led to their exile. Rather than punishing the people for their sins, he is forgiving them and releasing them from their debt. *"I will remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing"* (Is 43:18-19).

In the gospel Jesus is also doing a "new thing". He overrides the Mosaic laws and offers forgiveness rather than punishment to a woman being stoned: *"Is there no one left to condemn you?"* he asks. *"No one Lord"* she replies. And he assures her --- *"Neither do I"*

What about *us*? What about we who are holding stones in *our* hands? What about we who have passed judgment on another? Jesus writes our sins in the sand. If we admit to our sins and lay down our stones, we too will be open to receive this "new thing" that Jesus reveals --- unconditional love and complete forgiveness. The choice is ours!

When we pray: *"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us..."* We are not asking God to keep score or to play a game of "tit for tat" with us. Rather, we are acknowledging that God can only forgive us to the extent that we are open to receiving forgiveness. The act that opens us to receiving forgiveness is our willingness to forgive others. That is, the willingness to lay down our stones and walk away. To the extent that we are able to do that there is no wrongdoing that God cannot pardon, and no sin from which he will not set us free. He wants to forgive us. He wants to welcome us home.

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *My Father's Robe* pages 210--213
- 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: Suffering

- 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 past week? What is the greatest pain in your life?
- C. Sunday Scripture Readings.

Isaiah 50:4--7
Luke 23:1--49

- D. Theme: Suffering

The “why” of suffering has baffled humankind since the dawn of time! Scripture offers no suitable explanation and simply seems to tell us that suffering is to be accepted as part of the human condition. Our reading from Isaiah seems to underscore acceptance of suffering in our life: *“I gave my back to those who beat me. My face I did not shield.”*

The passion and death of Jesus offers us the consolation that God is with us in our suffering. God, in the person of Jesus, comes face-to-face with what it means to be human – what it means to suffer. God is not merely playing at being human; the body of Jesus is not a disguise, it's not a “second home.” His suffering is real – and it hurts. For the nails Jesus must open his hands – the hands that have healed the sick. For the nails Jesus must lift his feet – the feet that have walked on the water. God is no longer hidden from our wants or from our fears. God is no longer remote in his heavenly shelter. God is one of us today. Alone. Abandoned. Stripped of everything.

Jesus dies because the world didn't understand him: *“They came looking for him with lanterns and weapons”* (Jn 18:3). Looking for the Light of the World with lanterns?! Looking for the Prince of Peace with weapons?!

The Light is not seen and the Prince of Peace dies a violent death. It doesn't make sense!

- E. Faith Sharing. *Come Next Spring* reflection *Voice in Ramah* pages 12--15 or *Why Do Bad Things Happen* pages 24-29. (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 past week? What has come to life or been restored in you this Lenten Season?
- 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.