



LENT BEGINS

Ash Wednesday, February 17, marks the beginning of the season of LENT. Lent is the liturgical season in which we prepare ourselves for Holy Week. The Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, almsgiving and reflection have long been employed by followers in order to more fully experience Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. There he suffered betrayal by a friend, rejection by his people, brutality from the soldiers, the desertion of his disciples, the shame of the cross, and the finality of death. Lent

offers us forty days and six Sundays leading up to this last week of Jesus' life in which we can become more open, receptive and attuned to the graces bestowed upon us in the faithfulness and love that led Jesus to Jerusalem and through the events that left him buried in a borrowed tomb on the outskirts of the city. Not the end of the story, to be sure, but the season of Lent will not let us skip over to the surprising glory of Easter without first being brought to the foot of the cross.

~ **Prayer** is an expression of our desire for righteousness with God.

~ **Fasting** enables us to walk lighter, be less burdensome, and open to the Spirit.

~ **Almsgiving** raises heads that we might see neighbors with the eyes of love.

~ **Reflection** opens minds to the teaching, the life, and the truth of Jesus.

This year we invite you, the members and friends of Providence, to engage in one or more of these ancient and still meaningful practices. In this Lenten Invitation you'll find described four ways to do so. Spiritual practices associated with Lent certainly are not limited to these. These have been chosen as ways that we, as the Body of Christ, God's church in this place, might journey through Lent together.



You are also invited to join us for our Holy Week worship services.

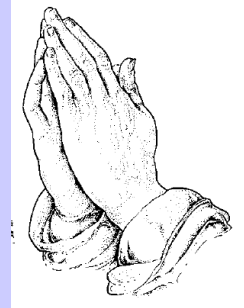
Sunday, March 28 Palm Sunday ~ Worship services in the Sanctuary at 9am and 11:15am
Thursday, April 1 Maundy Thursday ~ Gather together around tables in the Fellowship Hall for a light supper and Communion at 6pm
Friday, April 2 Good Friday ~ Tenebrae service in the Sanctuary at 7:30pm
Sunday, April 4 Celebrate Easter! ~ Sunrise service at 6:30 am
Worship services in the Sanctuary at 9 am, 10 am, and 11:15 am

Prayer

No matter how old you are, what life situations you are going through, or how close you feel to God, there are six types of prayer that can express your desire for righteousness with God.

SHOUT! to God in penitent prayer.

- S**hh – Listen for God’s voice and direction
- H**elp – Ask for God’s help for yourself or petition for others
- O**ops – Confess to God your mistakes and sin
- U**gh – God is there to hear your pain and anger
- T**hanks – Every blessing deserves a “thanks” to God
- !** – Speechless awe for God’s grace



As you prepare yourself for Holy Week, over these next 40 days, we invite you to pray for every member of Providence Presbyterian Church. Be in awe for what this community has done for you and the world. Tell God your pain and give thanks for a church friend who has helped you through a difficult time. Confess how you have hurt a church member, and ask for God to care for her.

Simply name someone and wait for God’s holy silence to lead you toward ministering and being with him.

Pick up a church directory and choose about 20 people a day. And if you don’t know someone you are praying for, such as a teenager or new member, make it your Sunday goal to meet them!

Fasting

Lent is a time for prayerful reflection and intentional action. It provides us an opportunity to discern how we are called to be and act as Christ’s disciples in our time, in our place.

Because we believe that Christian discipleship involves caring for God’s Creation, we believe Lent is a time to refocus our commitments toward eco-justice and stewardship.

(adapted from *Living in Lent* by Presbyterians for Earth Care)

Here are ten ways you can walk lighter and be less burdensome on your neighbors during Lent.

- 1) Spend some time every day noticing and giving thanks for something in nature.
- 2) Fast from single-use cups, bottles or shopping bags.
- 3) Say a short prayer every time you recycle or conserve water.
- 4) Fast from red meat or other intensively farmed products.
- 5) Write a letter of thanks and encouragement to your neighborhood recycling program.
- 6) Fast from the thermostat, by turning it down 1-2 notches.
- 7) When you read Scripture, consider what each passage implies about creation care.
- 8) Fast from your vehicle for one day a week, or for any trip under a half mile.
- 9) Buy fair trade coffees, organic produce, and local foods.
- 10) Fast from junk mail by going to www.dmachoice.org/mps/proto1.php.

Or, if you prefer a traditional Lenten calendar, follow along at:

www.pcusa.org/environment/pdf/lentcalendarnew.pdf



**Caring
for God's
Creation**

Almsgiving

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBq6atsDScU>

“We live in a world where more than a billion of our brothers and sisters never get enough to eat. In a world with far more than enough food for all, they are stalked daily by the fear of starvation.”

The first step is having our heads raised to see “the least of these among us.” These too are our neighbors, the very neighbors Jesus instructed followers to love as they love themselves.

This Lenten season, you are invited to set aside one dollar a day for each of the forty days. By Easter, you will have enough to feed 160 children a hot meal through Stop Hunger Now. If you choose the practice of almsgiving this Lenten season, please use the enclosed Stop Hunger Now packaging bag to collect your dollars.

A dollar a day during the forty days of Lent will provide nutritious meals for malnourished children around the world. Let us deepen our discipleship to Jesus by caring for his hungry ones in a way that truly demonstrates God’s love.

Bring your dollars on Easter Sunday so we can reach our goal of \$7,500 and pack another 30,000 meals.

For more information on Stop Hunger Now, go to www.stophungernow.org. Also, if you are interested in engaging in a more in-depth study or in a group study, read *Ending Hunger Now* by George McGovern, Robert Dole, and Donald Messer.



Reflection

Ah yes, but reflection on what? Well, since Lent is our journey with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem and the final week of his life, then what better to reflect upon than the story of his life as presented in the gospels?

Mark opens his gospel with the words, “The beginning of the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” He uses “gospel” for the message of salvation through Jesus, specifically through his suffering, death, and resurrection. An inscription from 9 BCE uses the noun to refer to the past event of the birth of the emperor Augustus: “The birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of ‘joyful messages’ which have gone forth because of him.” The idea that the birth, coming of age and ascent to the throne was good news for the world would have come to mind when Christian missionaries came preaching “joyful messages” or “good news” or “gospel.”

By presenting a narrative about Jesus as the basis of Christian preaching, the gospel writers assume that *the life of Jesus provides evidence for its claims*. What do you think? Does the life of Jesus, as recorded in the gospels, provide evidence for claims such as Mark’s assertion that this is the Son of God? Do the gospel narratives give support to such bold declarations as: *I am the Light of the world; I am the way, the truth, and the life; I am the good shepherd; I am the resurrection and the life?*

You are invited to read and reflect upon one of the gospels, or all four, through these forty days of Lent. Reflect upon the life of Jesus, his compassionate touch, the stories, the people he confronted and those he comforted, and all with whom he communed. What signs point to what he would accomplish in his last week of life? Walk with Jesus, as did the disciples, and listen for his words to you.

The **Gospel of Matthew** highlights the Jewish origin and identity of Jesus. Jesus is God's anointed, or messiah, and the one who best envisions and interprets God's plan for God's people. Jesus is presented as a great teacher of Israel like Moses was in Israel's past. But the law and traditions of Israel are given new meaning by Jesus.



In the **Gospel of Mark**, Jesus' preaching and manifestation of the Kingdom of God is presented as a decisive new development in the history of Israel. That the Kingdom of God would come, they all surely believed and longed for. But that the Kingdom would come in the middle of history and in the person of this itinerant preacher—**that**, no one expected. Conflicts ensued. And much of Mark communicates the good news through conflicts. Jesus confronts the high priestly rulers, then finds himself in conflict with their Roman overlords. In Mark, the only group modeling faithfulness is the women. Even his own disciples don't understand and they betray, deny and desert him.

Luke's gospel is beautifully written, well thought out, and presents Jesus as savior of the world.

Jesus is the culmination of the history of Israel and the fulfillment of all Israel's hopes. But as such, Jesus is the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham to bless all through his "chosen." In Luke's gospel Jesus teaches by parable and story, his healings demonstrate his power and signify the presence of the Kingdom of God in their midst. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the universal Savior of humankind.

John's gospel is different. Jesus is the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. He is a human being and a social being as well. John records fewer incidents in Jesus' life, but those he does record he does with much greater detail. Conversations and questions and dialogue are all here. John's gospel contains the great "I AM" statements of Jesus. And the stated purpose of this

gospel is that: *we might come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing we might have life in his name.*

So, pick one or read all four...it is up to you. But reflect on the life, teachings, actions, healings, touch, and prayers of Jesus as you walk with him through Lent.

You are invited to journey together through Lent with the members and friends of Providence by engaging in one or more of these ancient and still meaningful Lenten practices.