

“WHY?” IN LENT

Lent Meditations 2025

*For the Middle School and
High School Students*

*of The Parish of St. John the
Evangelist, Hingham,
Massachusetts*

“You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”

John 15.16

INTRODUCTION

The season of Lent is a specific time in the Church's year for us to take a step back, and think seriously about our journey in life, our relationships with one another, our community life, and our relationship with God. Lent lasts forty days and forty nights, following the example of Jesus' own forty days in the wilderness between his baptism and his adult ministry. For many centuries, Christians have modeled the season approaching Easter in such a way, so as to make space in their lives to re-align their faith and what is important to them, as they approach the celebration of Christ's Resurrection at Easter.

Quite often, people have questions about what we do in chapel, what exactly makes us an Episcopal church, and how we might create more opportunities to engage with our faith. So, this year, for our Middle and High School students (though this is available to anyone who is interested) a Lenten Study has been devised following the theme of "Why?" in Lent.

Every week in Lent, there is a short meditation which you can either take part in and use, or not if you don't want to.

Each week, we will take a question which a middle or high school student somewhere has asked during about "why" we do certain things in church, why people believe certain

things, and why we make the choices we make. There will then be a response to the question, thinking particularly about how Lent might help us answer it.

There will be a student's question, a scripture passage, a meditation, some questions to reflect on, and a prayer to use. These will also be shared in church services, and they will help us prepare for our Eucharist in Holy Week, as we move towards celebrating Easter.

“Why?” in Lent is designed to be a simple, reflective, and non-forced prayer guide through the season, with the hope of generating conversation, and helping us to think about what we do in chapel, why we do it, and what it might really mean for us.



“WHY?” IN LENT

1

SILENCE



Question

“How can church be helpful for someone like me who’s trying to figure out what I believe?”



Scripture

“When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

Revelation 8.1



Meditation

Whoever you are, and wherever you are on your journey, one of the ways church can be helpful, is when we practice silence.

Before any service in church begins, we observe a few moments of silence. Sometimes, in our services, we keep longer periods of silence. Sometimes the whole service is silence.

Silence can be awkward. It can be disorienting. It can be difficult to keep, and hard to do. But silence is vital. It's an important spiritual practice, and it's an important quality in life.

Sometimes, our only response to life experiences, or even God, is silence. Sometimes it's the only way we can make sense of things. It can often be the way that God responds to us – waiting in silence, to see how we respond to Him, or how we respond to one another. If you have silence, no one and nothing is forced or manipulated. You can simply be present to one another, without the need for loud, fast, maybe unnecessary words, and give yourself the opportunity to really learn from one another.

The next time you're in church, try silence; take the time to think and pray about what is really important to you, and how you might connect with God and one another. For, once we've observed silence, we can then begin the next step of our Lenten journey.



Reflection

When was the last time silence was the only response you could give to someone?

Can you think of a time when silence was helpful, or when it was the best way of engaging in an experience?

How often do you practice silence?

Does your life have enough silence?



Prayer

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The Collect for Purity from the Book of Common Prayer



“WHY?” IN LENT

2

CONFESSiON



Question

“I wish we had more time in church to actually think about things. When we say, “We confess our sins,” what does that actually mean? We say it so quickly. Maybe we need more time to actually confess?”



Scripture

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

John 14.27



Meditation

Without breaking any confidence, the high school student who asked this week's question was a junior at the time, who told me they asked this question as they genuinely believe that we need more time in church, to use that silence and space to connect with what we're really there to do.

They have a point.

When we gather for the Eucharist, or any act of worship, confession follows the silence. It often starts with a specific confessional prayer from the prayer book, and then a prayer called a "collect," which, as it sounds, "collects together" the theme of the service and prepares us for what we're going to think about in the service. Or, to put it another way, the confession allows you to break apart the pieces going on in your life, and the acceptance of forgiveness which follows in the "absolution" (when the priest reminds us that God forgives us) and the collect that finishes it, draws the pieces back together and helps us orient them towards God.

So, when we gather in church, the first thing we do is stop, and be silent. And then, before we do anything else, we prepare ourselves and order everything towards God, so that we're ready – ready to find a more permanent way to transform those moments of self-realization into a lifetime of self-giving.

So, what is a genuine confession?

In an Episcopal school a few years ago, there was a twelve-year-old girl named Emily. One day, in a Religion class on Christian baptism, Emily suddenly burst into tears and ran outside the classroom. When the teacher later asked her how she was, she said, “I’m sorry sir, but the whole “baptism-starting again thing” sounded so beautiful.”

The teacher asked her, “Why don’t you ask your local church about it?”

She responded, “I can’t commit to something I don’t think I can live up to.”

Emily, like our junior in upper school, didn’t take words like “sin,” “brokenness,” “reconciliation,” or “healing” in vain. She meant them; so much so, that she was prepared to do the hard work of wading through the mess, before she even came to the altar. And although she needed to know that God already loved her, so she could begin the baptismal journey, deep down she was already doing the work of reconciliation better than most.

What if we could live with that degree of honesty? An honesty which comes from being vulnerable enough to accept who we really belong to.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

What if we could live that way?



Reflection

When did you last have to prepare for something important? How did you prepare for it?

When was the last time you felt as though you were so busy that all you were finding in life were random pieces?

How did you bring them together and make something out of them?

When was the last time you asked for forgiveness, and meant it?

When was the last time someone asked you for forgiveness, and they meant it, and you knew it?



Prayer

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

From “The Serenity Prayer,” by Reinhold Niebuhr



“WHY?” IN LENT

3

WORDS



Question

“Father Ed, why do we spend fifteen minutes in chapel every day, saying the same readings, psalms, prayers, and singing the same old hymns over and over again?”



Scripture

“And he told them many things in parables.”

Matthew 13.3



Meditation

Fifteen minutes is an important amount of time.

Shortly before I left the first church I served as a priest, an elderly woman who I used to visit each month to take Communion at home, was taken to hospital, and was soon close to the end of her life. On the night when she passed away, I sat in the hospital room with her, and her extended family.

The moment came when the doctors told us that she was peaceful and there wasn't much we could do now, except gently turn off the machines and let her drift away. As many of us will know, when you turn off a life support machine, you've often got about fifteen minutes before the person stops breathing. And the last two senses to go in those fifteen minutes are hearing and touch.

How do you fill those fifteen minutes?

Well, we sang. We sang the hymns and songs she had known all her life, in her many days going to church.

We read her favorite Psalms, her favorite Bible verses, and poems she loved reading when she was younger.

We told her over and over again, while holding her hand, that she was loved. And, like at the altar and even on the coffee table in her living room, we shared Communion by her bedside; and as the bread was shared I anointed my friend

with holy oil, with the sign of the cross, gently on her forehead.

And, after fifteen minutes, she went.

And, although there were tears, they were tears not simply of sadness, but joy – a deep joy having acknowledged and celebrated a life so full of the power and glory of God. How wonderful.

At some point in our life, we all need to know how to fill fifteen minutes with someone who believes that those fifteen minutes matter more than anything else.

At some point, we're going to need someone to do that for us. We all will.

And the most joyful, even the most bizarre, even the most boring things we do in church, could be for someone a sign of God's Kingdom breaking into our world, and a moment treasured in our heart and in the heart of God for eternity – if we let it.

That's why we go to church, even if just for fifteen minutes - or in the school chapel where a student first asked me about this - and read the Bible, sing hymns, tell stories, and pray.

So that we can we remind ourselves of the gifts we need, for the moments when we need them most.



Reflection

One day this week, take fifteen minutes. Sit still for those fifteen minutes.

Think of someone you know and love. How might you fill those fifteen minutes for them?

What do you think they would want you to say or do for them?

How would you like someone to fill those fifteen minutes for you?

Think of the words and gestures that are important to you.

What might be important for someone else?

What could you do this week, in just fifteen minutes, that might make a difference in someone else's life?

What might be important to them?



Prayer

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
 compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

*Christ Has No Body
By St Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)*



“WHY?” IN LENT

4

SENSES



Question

“*Why do we have the Eucharist, and these things that are more like rituals? We don’t have these at my friend’s church.*”



Scripture

“*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*”

Luke 22.19



Meditation

Where do you call home?

A friend of mine is from China. We first met in London some years ago at my former church. As we talked for the first time, I learned that she had not been home to see her family for nearly two whole years. So, I asked her, "Do you ever get homesick?"

And she said, "No, because the Eucharist is my home."

This phrase completely floored me, because not only could I never say anything as profound, but because I think my friend had beautifully, in fact perfectly, summed up what the Eucharist is, and actually what "faith" is.

Why do we celebrate the Eucharist?

On the night before he died, at supper with his friends, Jesus took bread. He blessed the bread, broke it and shared it, and as he did so, he told his disciples, "This is my body." Then, he took a cup of wine, gave thanks, blessed it and shared it with his disciples, and said "This is my blood."

Essentially, he then continues: "Every time you gather as friends, and share this meal in this way, do this in remembrance of me. Remember all the things that I taught you, all that God has done for you in me, and give thanks. So, love one another; love one another and God as God has loved you."

And so, Christians have celebrated this meal for centuries, from one generation to another, as churches, as communities, as families, as friends. And whenever we do this, we do this in remembrance of him, for everything he has done for us and everything God has given to us in him. And we give thanks, reminding ourselves and one another of what this means - of what it means to love one another.

We could probably leave it there. But what might it mean for someone to say, “the Eucharist is my home”?

After my wife and I were married, knowing I find wearing jewelry uncomfortable, my wife sympathetically said, “I don’t mind you taking your wedding ring off. Our marriage is the most important thing.” Appreciating this, I took the ring off a few days after our wedding.

When we returned to our parish weeks later, an elderly woman, who regularly caused me trouble... cornered me after church. She asked how the wedding had been and noticed my bare left hand. She shouted, “Where is your ring?!”

I panicked.

“You bad man!” she said. “Go home! Put that ring back on now!”

I stuttered, desperate and unable to articulate a response. “That ring,” she said, “is a reminder of your marriage to that poor girl! Put it back on, and never take it off again!”

Later, I thought about what my nemesis had said. And, as I looked at the ring on my left hand... I experienced the most profound sensation.

For a moment, I was transported right back to the moment my wife and I were married. And, I remembered remarking to a friend, “I don’t normally like jewelry, but this ring is comfortable.”

To which my friend replied, “That’s because it’s been blessed.”

The joy I felt at the realization that I really was loved was so powerful it moved me to tears.

I’ve never taken it off since. Not because I’m afraid the old woman will appear... But because I know this ring is not a reminder, but an embodied communication, immediately connecting me to the moment everything made sense. And that’s when I know I’m home.

What is that moment is for you?

When you stood before someone and shared something that would transform your isolation into communion, or your mourning into dancing? When someone said to you for the first time, forever, “It’s you.” Or, strangely perhaps, when someone called you out on something, but meant it?

That’s why we pray. And that’s what the Eucharist is...

An embrace of peace, a promise; but more than words or actions: a prayer, embodied and living, where we re-live again, the moment the one who loved us most said, “Remember me.”



Reflection

What is that moment is for you?

When you stood before someone and shared something that would transform your life?

When someone said to you for the first time, “It’s you”?

When someone called you out on something, but meant it?

What might that object, action, or experience be, which transports you back to that moment?

What reminds you of home? Or, of those who you love?

How do you carry them with you?



Prayer

*“When break the bread, we share in the body of Christ.
So, although we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in the one bread.”*

*Adapted from The Church of England’s Common Worship,
Holy Communion, Order One.*



“WHY?” IN LENT

5

BLESSING



Question

“*Why do we have to go to church?*”



Scripture

“*One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.*”

Psalm 145.4



Meditation

This last question is a simple but important one, and one which, if we can answer it, might help make sense of everything else we've reflected on during Lent.

Some years ago, I was contacted out of the blue by two organizations in a town where I served as a priest: a group of local dementia care homes which specialized in caring for people with Alzheimer's Disease, and a local community center for persons with learning disabilities. An initial contact eventually led to monthly services, weekly visits, and many new friendships.

Around the same time, I had begun working with a new youth initiative at one of our churches. Each week, on Thursday nights, we would gather for food, worship, games and socializing. One evening, as a group of us were leaving the church, one of the students noticed the community center across the street, and asked, "Where goes on in there?"

A series of conversations followed at our next weekly meeting, when we were planning what to do during Holy Week that year. And, an opportunity presented itself...

During Holy Week, we organized a week of service for all the church youth groups in our district. Each day, about two hundred students, ministers and volunteers, gathered at one of the churches in town. In the morning, there would be games, group discussions, an act of worship and a talk, followed by lunch. Then, in the afternoon, we would split off into groups, doing social action projects in the local

community: from painting fences and gardening, grocery shopping for the elderly, to helping with care home visits and services, particularly at the centers which I visited and which the students were curious about.

It was beautiful to witness so much joy at the opportunity of offering something so simple yet so valuable to someone else. As one student remarked as we left the community center, 'I've never met anyone like that before.'

I asked them, 'How did this afternoon make you feel?'

The student replied, 'I used to think people like that were weird, but all they want is what I want...'

Are we going there again?"

About a month later, a group of us did. And, a few weeks after that, we visited again...

This is why we gather for worship in our school chapel; why we go to church; and why we pray, and worship God.

Worship is not an idle gesture - it's a means through which we engage with our relationship with God, and then ask how that relationship might inform the other relationships of our lives, and how we love and serve others. So that then, we can learn how to embrace the opportunities which grow out of the prayers we make, in response to the needs of the world around us. And, in this, we realize that we're all in this together.

That is why, as we have followed through in these Lent meditations, we begin with silence...

Then we offer a confession...

Then we use words to engage with God and neighbor...

Then we use our senses to embrace more deeply what, or rather who we're engaging with in worship...

And then, finally, before we leave the church, we pray God's blessing and are dismissed.

This is why the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, is also called the "Mass." It comes from the Latin, "Missa" which means "dismissal," to be dismissed. In other words, we've worshipped God, and now we are blessed and dismissed to go out into the world, and share what we have received in worship with everyone we meet.

What might that look like for you, in your Holy Week this year?



Reflection

When you pray, what do you pray for?

Are your prayers like a grocery list, or a Christmas list, of things you would like to have?

Are they things you'd like God to do for you?

Or, are your prayers a list of things you're thankful for?

Maybe they're a list of things you'd like God to help you to do yourself? Or, things you could do for others?

Maybe you'll find yourself thinking more about others?

And that's where you'll find God?



Prayer

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The Prayer after Communion from The Book of Common Prayer -
recited at the end of every Eucharist.*



“WHY?” IN LENT

6

“STARTING AGAIN”

TEACHING “EUCHARIST” AT HOME



Question

“So, if I want to understand the Eucharist, where do I start?”



Scripture

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.”

Romans 12.2



Meditation

Throughout these Lent meditations, we have been reflecting on particular questions students have had about what we do in chapel and why, particularly regarding the Eucharist. Each week, we have taken a student's question, and answered it by reflecting on the particular aspect of the Eucharist which the student has asked about. In this final meditation for our Lenten series, we are now going to take all those different elements, and think about how we actually put them into practice during this special time of year where we now find ourselves: Holy Week.

The following meditation and reflection was originally designed as a chapel service known as a "Taught Eucharist." Here, we take each element of the service and reflect on its meaning as we "walk through it." However, being at home is actually a very useful place to be, when teaching or learning about the Eucharist.

The earliest Christians used to celebrate the Eucharist in people's houses - it was, like the event out of which it was born, a meal shared around a table with friends. The Eucharist began at the Last Supper, the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples on the night before he died. As we will reflect upon shortly, it was the meal which Jesus commanded his friends to continue sharing, so they could remember him and all he taught them. The Last Supper itself was a Passover meal, which in itself marked the Exodus when the children of Israel were redeemed from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, through the leadership of Moses. As Christians believe, in the same way that God

passed over and redeemed his children then, God will now do the same thing again for his children through Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection. Thus, in the Jewish tradition, the festival of Passover and indeed the Seder meal is practiced which recalls the events of the Exodus and Passover, whereas in the Christian tradition the Eucharist is offered. Jesus is now the Passover for us, and the Eucharist has become the Passover or "thanksgiving" meal for Christians in this respect. Indeed, the word Eucharist is an ancient Greek word meaning "thanksgiving," thus a meal to give thanks for all that God has done for us.

So, in the meditation that follows, we will be reflecting on the meaning of the Eucharist, but instead of a "taught service" in our church, we are going to reflect on the Eucharist as a meal with family and friends, as, in many respects, it was originally intended, and as our heritage with our Jewish brothers and sisters teaches.

Of course, the Eucharist is a Sacrament, specifically where a priest and congregation pray together that the bread and wine become, in some sense, Jesus' Body and Blood, and God's presence can thus be experienced among them. This meditation, especially given that it is designed to be practiced at home, without a priest and congregation in a church more traditionally, is designed to think more about how we live out what the Eucharist teaches, rather than "saying the Mass" per se. The meditation will therefore focus on the practice of eating together and meditating on Jesus' teachings, rather than praying the Eucharist in its more traditional form. You might say that what we're doing here is sacramental or sacred, because it should bring us closer to one another and

God, but it is not a traditionally understood Sacrament as such. The meal will thus follow the pattern from John’s Gospel in particular, whose account of the Last Supper focuses more explicitly on the teachings of Jesus which both surround and explain the meaning of the supper and how it might become part of our very life.

You could study this alone, but perhaps it would be better with someone you share your home with. You could even do this “online” with friends. And maybe, despite the restrictions we currently experience in our society, whether that is because of the virus, or indeed because of the breakdowns in our relationships with one another, whatever kind of faith we hold this practice might actually help us learn more about what the Eucharist means at its heart: the imperative to love one another, and God, as God has loved us, whoever you are, and wherever you are.

Let us pray.



Reflection

A Thanksgiving Meal for Holy Week

Gathering

In your home, wherever you are, gather together with those who you live with.

Take a Bible, and read the following passage:

John 14.1-6, 13-14

“Jesus, the way to the Father”

Preparation

Prepare a meal.

Maybe make the meal together in the kitchen.

Try and cook everything from scratch.

Once the meal is ready, sit down together around a table.

Join hands.

Now, that you are gathered together, the meal can begin.

Silence

The first thing we do is keep *silence* for a few moments.

Read the passage:

John 16.12-15

“I have many things to speak to you”

And think or reflect together...

When was the last time silence was the only response you could give to someone?

Can you think of a time when silence was helpful, or when it was the best way of engaging in an experience?

How often do you practice silence?

Does your life have enough silence?

Confession

Now that you've held silence, being in the presence of those around you, and in the presence of God, maybe turn to those around you, and reflect on how you live together.

Read the passage:

John 13.21-30

“Jesus foretells His betrayal”

Think or reflect together...

*When did you last have to prepare for something important?
How did you prepare for it?*

When was the last time you felt as though you were so busy that all you were finding in life were random pieces?

How did you bring them together and make something out of them?

When was the last time you asked for forgiveness, and meant it?

When was the last time someone asked you for forgiveness, and they meant it, and you knew it?

Is there someone at the table who you want to gather those broken pieces with right now?

Try it...

Then, finish by reading:

John 12.44-50

“Summary of Jesus’ teaching”

Words

Now that we have gathered, kept silence, and offered the hand of friendship to one another, even if a friendship needs to go much further, we are now in a position to engage with one another more deeply using our words.

At the Eucharist, words often involve scripture, shared reflection (like a sermon) and prayer, followed by a sign of peace.

So, sit down together, and continue reading.

And this time, read:

John 15.1-17

“Jesus, the true vine”

Talk about the passage together.

Think about what it means.

What do you think the passage means for the people sitting around the table with you?

How does each person read and interpret this passage?

Think about each person at the table, and what you've read together in scripture so far.

What do you think they would want you to say or do for them?

Then, read together:

John 13.1-20

“Jesus washes the disciples’ feet”

Think of the words and gestures in life that are important to you.

What might be important for someone else?

What could you do this week, that might make a difference in someone else's life?

What might be important to them?

As your readings, words and reflections become ideas for how to serve each other, maybe start sharing the meal around the table...

Senses

As you share the food around the table, ask someone to read aloud:

Luke 22:7-20

“Jesus institutes the Eucharist”

And so, remember together...

On the night before Jesus died, he shared one last meal with his friends. He took bread and wine, and as He blessed it and shared it round the table, He told his friends to keep on doing this, sharing this meal and passing it down from generation to generation. So that every time we do this, we will remember Jesus and everything he has done for us, and the most important thing He taught: to love one another as God has loved us.

This is what helps makes sense of all the things we learn in the Eucharist and in this thanksgiving meal, and what we ultimately give thanks for – that God is with us, and he has given us everything we will ever need to worship and love him and love one another.

Now that you've shared the food around the table, and remembered what this great thanksgiving is for, pause again, and read:

John 16.1-15

“The work of the Spirit”

Once everyone has food, ask if anyone wants to pray.

Offer prayers around the table:

things you're grateful for;

things you'd like to change;

things that are important or special to you;

things that are important to someone else;

maybe even something you shared during the confession and reflection together;

or something special that you would like to share...

As you begin eating together, amidst the conversation ask someone to read:

John 16.16-24

“Sorrow will turn into joy”

And so, reflect together...

What is that special moment is for you?

What might be that significant moment when someone or something becomes clear to you, and you know God is doing something in this?

Maybe, when you stood before someone and shared something that would transform your life?

Or, when someone called you out on something, but meant it?

What might that object, action, or experience be, which transports you back to that moment?

What reminds you of home; of those who you love?

How do you carry them with you?

Maybe this meal will be one of those moments you remember in years to come?

Continue eating and talking together.

Blessing

At the end of the meal, clear the table and return to it once everything has been taken away. Sit back around the table together.

Ask one person to read:

John 17.1-5, 25-26

“Jesus prays for His disciples”

And think or pray together...

Pray for yourself, and for one another.

And when you pray, maybe think about who and what you’re praying for?

Think... are your prayers like a grocery list, or a Christmas list, of things you would like to have?

Are they things you’d like God to do for you?

Or, are your prayers a list of things you’re thankful for?

Maybe they’re a list of things you’d like God to help you to do yourself? Or, things you could do for others?

Maybe you’ll find yourself thinking more about others?

And that’s where you’ll find God?

At the end of your reflection together, stand around the table, and join hands.

Read together:

Philippians 4.1, 4-9

A final thanksgiving prayer.

At this point, everyone may depart, with the words, “Thanks be to God.”

You could even finish with the prayer below.



Prayer

*Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.
Amen.*

Prayer of St Richard of Chichester

