

Possible Themes for Lent Year B 2024 (updated from prior version)

Themes can help us to focus on different aspects of Lent. Lent has traditionally been a time of repentance, of turning back to God, of giving up things that tie us to this world to look to the cross. Historically, however, the Sundays of Lent were not included in the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter and were seen as “mini Easters,” times to break from the fast, celebrate the Resurrection and claim the new life in Christ.

As you think of a theme for Lent this year, take some time to reflect on your congregation. What is your congregation’s story? Are you in a time of transition? Leadership change? In a time of spiritual plateau? What message of hope in the resurrection does your congregation need to hear this Lent?

Possible Themes for Preaching and Worship:

God’s Covenant: The Hebrew scriptures for Year A primarily focus on the covenant of God with the people:

Genesis 9:8-17: God’s covenant with Noah and all the earth

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16: God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants

Exodus 20:1-17: God’s covenant with the people through Moses on Mount Sinai (10 Commandments)

Numbers 24:1-9, paired with John 3:14-21: God saves the people from their sinuous ways/God’s covenant through Christ to save the world.

Jeremiah 31:31-34: The New Covenant in the people’s hearts

Isaiah 50:4-9a: The Suffering Servant, the People of Israel/God’s Covenant to always be with the people.

Return from Exile: In an election year (US), this might give hope for the kin-dom that is not of this world

Isaiah 40:1-8, 26-31: God Renews our Strength

Isaiah 43:1-7, 18-19: God Is Doing Something New

Zechariah 9:9-16: God Will Raise a New King

Haggai 2:1-9: God Will Renew the Temple

Jeremiah 31:8-17: God Will Bring the People Home

Jeremiah 23:1-8: God Will Restore the People and Raise Up a Righteous Branch

“I Am”: Exploring Jesus’ “I Am” statements in John’s Gospel

John 6:26-51: I Am the Bread of Life

John 8:12-30 (or 9:1-41): I Am the Light of the World

John 10:1-18: I Am the Gate/I Am the Good Shepherd

John 11:1-45: I Am the Resurrection and the Life

John 14:1-14: I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

John 15:1-17: I Am the Vine, You are the Branches

General themes from prior years:

Water: Historically, the two most important feast days in the Church were Epiphany and Easter, when baptisms were celebrated. Advent and Lent were both seasons to prepare for baptism and new life. Think of all the Biblical lessons involving water: Creation, The Flood, The Jordan River, Crossing the Red Sea, Water from the Rock, The Woman at the Well, Washing the Disciples Feet, Walking on the Water, Calming of the Sea, etc.

The Seven Deadly Social Sins: Gandhi’s Seven Deadly Social Sins

(The First Baptist Church in Beverly, MA shared this idea a few years ago):

Politics without principle

Wealth without work

Commerce without morality

Pleasure without conscience
Education without character
Science without humanity
Worship without science

(could start the week of Ash Wednesday to end on Holy Week)

The Six Days of Creation: Focusing on the rebirth of Spring, looking at how God's promises have been revealed throughout creation.

Spiritual Practices: Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, Meditation, Solitude, and Pilgrimage—focusing on the many different forms of Christian spiritual disciplines that are found in the Bible.

Wilderness and Wandering: As Lent is often seen as a reflection of Jesus' journey into the wilderness for forty days, one can begin with Jesus in the wilderness, Abraham as a wandering Aramean, Moses and the Israelites wandering in the desert, the people in the wilderness of exile, and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (not exactly the wilderness but a place where Jesus felt certainly alone—an example of how we might find wilderness times in our own lives)

Forgiveness: Explore Jesus' teachings on forgiveness as in this season we repent and turn from sin: Matthew 6:7-15 (Forgive as God forgives), Matthew 5:21-26 (Reconciliation), Luke 15:11-32 (Restoration), John 7:53-8:11 (No Condemnation), Mark 11:20-26 (Faith and Forgiveness), and Luke 23:32-43 (Pardon).

Whatever theme you choose, you can take an idea and brainstorm it scripturally, such as the Water theme above. Sin can be a theme, or Covenant, or New Life, etc.

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