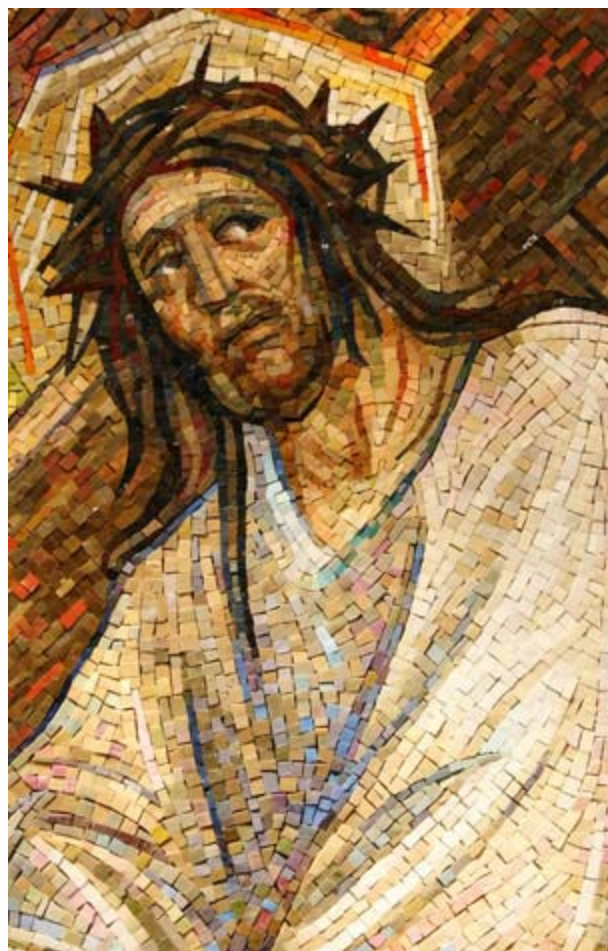


The Bright Sadness



A Lenten Devotional
by Jenny Lee

Foreword

For many of us, Lent is a great mystery, practiced often by our friends who attend more liturgical churches. However, Lent is available to all persons seeking to prepare and more deeply understand the true meaning of Easter and the work of the Cross. Through the next 40 days leading up to Easter, we will be working through this study together, each of us praying the same prayers and asking the same questions. I ask that you hold yourself and one another accountable.

What is Lent?

The Lenten season has had some role in Christian life since before the 2nd Century AD when Irenaus of Lyons wrote of it. It has evolved considerably since then, but the idea remains the same - it is a time of “self-examination and penitence, demonstrated by self-denial, in preparation for Easter.”¹ Lent is a season of examining who you are and who God is and embracing the roles.

Sometimes during Lent, an individual chooses to make a sacrifice and removes something from his or her regular life. It can be a type of food, a habit, or something that you spend time doing (video games, TV, shopping, etc.) The point is to sacrifice something that is important to you and instead fill that time engaging God. Consider what you might give up for the next 40 days. This devotional offers suggestions of things you might sacrifice - **these are by no means mandatory, nor will they be beneficial for everyone.** These are simply ideas that have historically accompanied Lenten devotion. For example, many people choose not to eat meat on Fridays. If you choose to remove something from your life, it must be personal and meaningful to *you*. Many people select certain days throughout the season to spend in fasting and prayer. Fasting is an important and holy spiritual discipline that is not to be entered into lightly. This is not an excuse to simply not eat. While fasting, one must be careful to drink **lots of fluids** like water or sports drinks and get a bit of extra sleep. A Lenten fast, be it a single meal or for the entire 40 days, is about learning from where true sustenance comes.

I would also like to make it very clear that *anything* you choose to sacrifice throughout this season is enough. Do not feel pressured to change your entire way of living in this one short period. You’ve probably heard the saying that “It is not the prayers you don’t pray that matter, it’s the prayers you do pray.” In the same way, Lent is not about what you do not give up, it is about the things you do and your sacrificial attitude.

As you look at a calendar, you might realize that Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday is more than 40 days. Here is why - Sundays do not count. The six Sundays of the Lenten season are to be spent celebrating the Resurrection. On these days you may break your fast and enjoy these “feast days.” Also, the last official day of Lent is the Saturday before Easter, March 22.

You might also be wondering why the season is 40 days long. Forty is a significant and symbolic number throughout the Bible. In this season, though, we use 40 days to remember Christ's 40 day fast in the desert before he began his ministry (see Luke 4:1-13). Like Jesus, we will use this time for reflection.

This devotion moves through six different sections: **Confession, Focusing on God, Sin and Rescue, Humility and Hope, the Coming Passion, and Passion Week.** Each section after the first is a week long. There are not seven devotions for each week. This was intentionally done to be sure that each day's reading gets the attention it is due as well as to allow you time to be creative in your personal time with God.

As you examine your role in the world, your sinful state, and your relationship with God, I remind you to never be without hope. The Orthodox Church calls the Lenten season the "Bright Sadness" because it is now when we understand not only our fallen state but the celebration of God's redemptive love. That is the other part of Lent - understanding our humanity but remembering the work of God. Living in the agonizing shadow of the cross but looking at the face of the Savior. Blessings to you in the Lenten season.

Jenny Lee

About Jenny Lee

The author of this Lenten guide is a first-year student at the Campbell University School of Divinity School in Buies Creek, North Carolina. She holds a B.A. in Religion from Campbell University and serves as the High School Ministry Intern at Trinity Baptist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. Jenny's hometown is Hendersonville, North Carolina and her home church, the First Baptist Church of East Flat Rock, NC.

Section 1: Confession

Feb. 6- 17

This section is about knowing and understanding our own fallen state and, more importantly, confessing that to God. As you work through the devotions given, think about your own heart. What are your failings and limitations? Do you own them or have you given them to God?

If you have decided to cut something out of life, this is the week to begin. Whatever you decide to remove from your routine will stay out until Easter (ideally). One suggestion is to remove all the junk food from your diet and eat smaller portions in general. Examine how you spend your time and try to watch less TV, video games, etc. Consider not eating meat on Friday.

- Begin each day of this section reading and praying the words of **Psalm 51**.
- Examine this prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

“Holy and merciful Father: We confess to you... that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven. We have been deaf to your call to serve, as Christ served us... **We have grieved your Holy Spirit.**”

Day 1:

Read **Genesis 3** today. As you examine the first sin, look at the effects that came from that first reach of Eve’s hand to the tree. The *entire* course of history was changed.

Day 2:

Read **Genesis 6:5-7**. Consider a world unredeemed. What sadness it is to see the God of all Grace regretting creation.

Day 3:

Read **Isaiah 58:1-12**. Do not move through these 40 days expecting something from God. We do not practice devotion because of what we will receive; rather, we live this way because it is how God created us to be. What do these verses tell us God requires from us? How will revival and renewal come?

Day 4:

Read **Joel 2:12-17**. Humble yourself. You will find grace.

Day 5:

Read **2 Corinthians 6:1-10**. Paul is not writing about being a Sunday morning Christian. He is writing about making a commitment. Do not take this gift of grace lightly. Do not let Christ's work be in vain.

Day 6:

Read **Acts 4:1-20**. "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Peter and John were bubbling over with a holy passion. Why then are we so quiet and small about our faith?

Section 2: Focusing on God

Feb. 17-23

The world has taught us to overindulge in our need for something to command our attention. We struggle not to feel lonely whenever we are alone and so we try to fill every second of our days, every space of our minds, with *something*. We become anxious when there is nothing to consume our thoughts and emotions.

What a surprise it is then, to realize that it is in those silent, alone times that we meet God. We, empty and quiet, please God. Consider the words of "If Thou Could'st Empty All Thyself of Self" by Sir Thomas Browne²:

If thou could'st empty all thyself of self,
Like to a shell dishabited,
Then might He find thee on the ocean shelf,
And say, "This is not dead,"
And fill thee with Himself instead.

But thou are all replete with very thou
And hast such shrewd activity,
That when He comes He says, "This is enow
Unto itself - 'twere better let it be,
It is so small and full, there is no room for me."

Lent is about discovering the wasted spaces in our lives.

Perhaps select one day or meal of this week to fast and pray. Consider cutting out more from your diet. If you removed all the sweets and junk food last week, maybe try also removing red meat this week. Continue to take smaller portions and engage less in the media. If you'd like, don't eat meat on Friday in remembrance of the Crucifixion and celebrate the Resurrection on Sunday. Most importantly, remember not to remove anything without replacing it with a focus on God. Fasting and sacrificing something is not about you- act in humility.

- Begin each day of this section reading and praying the words of **Psalm 63:1-8**.

Day 1:

Read **John 13:1-17**. Consider the servant spirit of the greatest Leader.

Day 2:

Read **Psalm 33**. Praise to the God of Love who commands fear and respect and acts out of grace and mercy. Sing to him a new song!

Day 3:

Read **Matthew 4:1-11**. Jesus was human, and hungry. Examine your own priorities and dedications.

Day 4:

Read **John 17**. We can learn so very much about ourselves and the character of Jesus by reading this prayer. Take note how often Jesus pleads for the unity of all believers.

Day 5:

Read **Psalm 121**. God is capable and trustworthy- the source of help and inspiration.

Section 3- Sin and Rescue

Feb. 24- March 1

So often we forget from what we have been saved. Our imaginations cannot approach the place where there is no gift of grace, no chance of mercy. If we could, for just one moment, understand a world devoid of the good things from God, then perhaps our rescue from that world would never be far from our minds.

We cannot understand the importance of our rescue without first understanding our sin. So many times we cloak the action of our salvation in big, impersonal words- it was a dramatic, intense *rescue*. Consider the meaning of Jesus' work.

Take time this week to remember what life was like before you chose to follow Christ. If, like many, you were a young child when you came to believe and you cannot remember, take some time to let your soul recognize God's presence throughout the stages of your life.

You might like to select a day this week to fast and pray. Try to continue avoiding all the things you've removed from your diet. Consider reducing your caffeine levels. Do not neglect to celebrate your rescue on Sunday! Be purposeful about how you spend your time and cut back on time wasted watching television, listening to music, or surfing the Internet.

- Begin each day reading **Psalm 130**.

Day 1:

Read **Psalm 79:5-10**. Consider the ways you have failed God. Would God be justified in being angry with you? Are you due some punishment?

Day 2:

Read **Exodus 12:1-13; 29-30**. How terrifying this night must have been! We, however, have been passed over; we are safe from the curse of sin. Through Christ's work we can escape the dangerous night of death and step out into the bright morning of life.

Day 3:

Read **Romans 5:6-11; 18-19**. These verses are the story of our second chance. Breathe deeply the fresh air of reconciliation and righteousness.

Day 4:

Read **Matthew 27:50-54**. The veil that once separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the Temple is torn, allowing everyone direct access to God. We are no longer bound by the law- God *wants* to be with us.

Day 5:

Read **John 8:2-11**. There is no judgment anymore. Jesus beckons, "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Section 4- Humility and Hope

March 2-8

The words of Ash Wednesday resound through the entire season of Lent- "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19b). This is a season of humility, of accepting our place and our limitations. Do not let yourself be saddened by reality, rather, embrace it. It was the very reason for your creation!

In addition, let your humility always be guided by the hope we have through Christ. We are flawed but we are being repaired. We are weary but we will have rest. We are empty but we are being filled.

This week, you might want to continue to select fast days or meals. Consider avoiding all sweets (anything with refined sugar), junk food, red meat and poultry, and caffeine. Perhaps you could select one or more nights this week to go completely wireless- no computers, television, radio, etc. Use this time as a sacrifice to God.

- Read **Psalm 23** each day this week.
- Consider and pray the words of Rich Mullins' song, "If I Stand":
"So if I stand let me stand on the promise that you will pull me through,
And if I can't, let me fall on the grace that first brought me to You."

And If I sing let me sing for the joy that has born in me these songs
And if I weep let it be as a man who is longing for his home.”

Day 1:

Read **John 16:20-22**. Take joy! Rest in the hope we’re given.

Day 2:

Read **James 4:1-10**. James has some pretty good advice. Be humbled, be lifted. Move outside yourself.

Day 3:

Read **Psalms 24**. “Who is he, this King of glory?” He is ours, and he wants us.

Day 4:

Read **2 Corinthians 4:6-12**. So often we forget that our lives and our ministries are not about us. Consider your own smallness.

Day 5:

Read **Isaiah 40:28-31**. What a wonderful promise! Work to commit these verses to memory.

Consider the words of D. Maddalena’s prayer:

“God grant me the ability to see myself as you see me. Yet protect me from what I find in my own heart, for surely it is more awful than I can bear. Forgive me, and carry my burden of grief when I see my failings. And God, don’t let me take credit for the good things you have given me. In your mercy help me to see the pride in my own heart. Heal and renew my spirit; refine the passion of my heart; and help me to walk in humility.”³

Section 5- The Coming Passion

March 9-15

We as humans want signs. We want proof that we are doing the right thing; we want to know that someone is leading the way. When some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus for a sign from him, Jesus replies that the only sign they will see is the sign of Jonah (Matt. 12: 38-41). He reminds them that Jonah suffered for three nights and days in the belly of the fish. He tells them that the Son of Man will be three nights and days in the heart of the earth.

None of us want to suffer. We do not want to die or to be in pain. Yet, this is what we find in a relationship with Christ. Henri Nouwen, in his book, Show Me the Way, writes,

“Suffering and death belong to the narrow road of Jesus.” As much as we are repelled by the idea of suffering, it is a life to be desired. Nouwen continues, “Even though Jesus went directly against the human inclination to avoid suffering and death, his followers realized that it was better to live the truth with open eyes than to live their lives in illusion.” Let that be our choice also. Amen.⁴

Consider removing fish from your diet so you spend the last two weeks of this season with a meatless diet. It may seem that you have nothing left to eat! Remember you are still free to eat rice, beans, fruit, nuts, grains, simple breads (no oil or refined sugar), vegetables, etc. You might want to continue fasting from the media but be sure to spend your newly found time in prayer and meditation. Celebrate on Sunday!

- Begin each day of this section reading and praying Psalm 130.

Day 1: Read **Ezekiel 37: 1-14; 26-28**. What a wonderful image of new life! Take time to remember your baptism, your personal image of new life.

Day 2: Read **Hebrews 7:23-28**. Our great high priest has come! He triumphed over the suffering and death that we are so afraid of... And this is love.

Day 3: Read **John 8: 31-36**. Take note that in verse 32 Jesus says “you will *know* the truth.” He doesn’t say “you will be exposed to the truth” or “you will have heard the truth.” This truth is one you must claim as your own.

Day 4: Read **2 Peter 1:16-19**. Here’s a sign for you- this is truth, reality. Peter knew what Truth looked like. He had felt the hands of Truth wash his feet. Rest easy.

Day 5: Read **Luke 15:11-32**. We’ve heard this story so many times that we think we know all there is to know about it. Do you know that it is *your* story? The power of this parable is not that it happened, it is that it *happens*. Welcome home.

Section 6- Passion Week

March 16-23

This week, we will remember. We watch the palm leaves flutter as Jesus is welcomed into the city. We taste the bread and wine as Jesus speaks. We listen to the angry cries of

the mob and recognize our own voice. We hear the clanging of hammer and nails. This is our story; we must be present for it.

Continue selecting fast days or meals if you choose. Consider enjoying a simple diet of rice, beans, fruits, nuts, grains, vegetables, simple breads, etc. Try fasting from the media but be intentional about your time with God. Many will choose to fast completely on Good Friday.

- Begin each day this week reading **Isaiah 53**.
- Pray “The Jesus Prayer” throughout the week:
 “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Palm Sunday: Read **Matthew 21:6-11**. From the outside, this is a day of joy, and yet, we who know how the story ends can see only pain. Today is the day of bright sadness. Suffering and hope mingle here.

- Prayer:
 - Almighty God, today we pay homage to Christ in his victory. With songs of praise we accompany him into his holy city; grant that we may come to the heavenly Jerusalem through him who lives and reigns with you to all eternity.⁵

Monday: Take time to consider your own life. Meditate on and remember the events leading up to your salvation.

- Prayer:
 - Rise Yahweh! God, raise your hand, do not forget the afflicted! You have seen for yourself the trouble and vexation; you watch so as to take it in hand. Yahweh, you listen to the laments of the poor. You give them courage, you grant them a hearing.⁶

Tuesday: Read **John 12:23-36**. Pay special attention to verses 27-29. Jesus approaches his death with a staggering sense of purpose, affirmed in every step by his Father, and always acting out of love.

- Prayer:
 - If you, O God, are for us, who can be against us? Since you did not spare your own Son, but gave him up for the sake of all of us, then can we not expect that with him you will freely give us all his gifts? Are we not sure that it is Christ Jesus, your Son, who died—yes and more, who was raised from the dead and is at God’s right hand—and who is adding his plea for us?⁷

Wednesday: Pray with your imagination today. Speak to God. Spend time in the Upper Room with Jesus and his disciples. Read **Matthew 26:17-25**.

- Prayer:
 - “Lord Jesus, I look at you, and my eyes are fixed on your eyes. Your eyes penetrate the eternal mystery of the divine and see the glory of God. They

are also the eyes that saw Simon, Andrew, Nathanael, and Levi, the eyes that saw the woman with a hemorrhage, the widow of Nain, the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the hungry crowd, the eyes that saw the sad, rich ruler, the fearful disciples on the land, and the sorrowful women at the tomb. Your eyes, O Lord, see in one glance the inexhaustible love of God and the seemingly endless agony of all people who have lost faith in that love and are like sheep without a shepherd.

As I look into your eyes, they frighten me because they pierce like flames of fire my innermost being, but they console me as well, because these flames are purifying and healing. Your eyes are so severe yet so loving, so unmasking yet so protecting, so penetrating yet so caressing, so profound yet so intimate, so distant yet so inviting.

I gradually realize that I want to be seen by you, to dwell under your caring gaze, and to grow strong and gentle in your sight. Lord, let me see what you see—the love of God and the suffering of people so that my eyes may become more and more like yours, eyes that can heal wounded hearts.⁸

Maundy Thursday: Read **John 13:1-15**. The question of verse 12 hangs in the air. And the answer is simple. “No. I do not understand, but I accept and I will follow.”

- Prayer:
 - God of all power and mercy, as your son prepared to suffer, he knelt to wash my feet. I do not understand, but I embrace the mystery even as I embrace the call to wash my neighbor’s feet. Grant me your peace and humility. In all my actions, help me to follow you in your servant leadership.

Good Friday: Read **John 19:1-37**. Read these verses several times and mourn for the one who took your place. Forget that you know how the story ends and consider the words to the old hymn, “See from His head, His hands, His feet, Sorrow and love flow mingled down. Did ere such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?”⁹

- Prayer:
 - O dear Lord, what can I say to you? Is there any word that could come from my mouth, any thought? Any sentence? You died for me, you gave all for my sins, you not only became man for me but also suffered the most cruel death for me. Is there any response? I wish that I could find a fitting response, but in contemplating your Holy Passion and Death I can only confess humbly to you that the immensity of your divine love makes any response seem totally inadequate. Let me just stand and look at you. Your body is broken, your head wounded, your hands and feet are split open by nails, your side is pierced. Your dead body now rests in the arms of your Mother. It is fulfilled. It is accomplished. Sweet Lord, gracious Lord, generous Lord, forgiving Lord, I adore you, I praise you, I thank

you. You have made all things new through your passion and death. Your cross has been planted in this world as the new sign of hope.

Let me always live under your cross, O Lord, and proclaim the hope of your cross unceasingly. Amen.¹⁰

Holy Saturday: Read **John 19:38-42**. Today we watch and wait. The Church holds her collective breath.

- Prayer:
 - I call to you, Yahweh, all day. I stretch out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead, can shadows rise up to praise you? Do they speak in the grave of your faithful love, of your constancy in the place of perdition? Are your wonders known in the darkness, your saving justice in the land of oblivion? But for my part, I cry to you, Yahweh, every morning my prayer comes before you.¹¹

Easter: Read **Matthew 28**. Celebrate! Praise him who died to bring us back into the fullness of life. Rather than rush to eat your candy and gorge yourself on everything you've been fasting from, slow down. Take time to reflect upon what this means. Read **Ezekiel 36:24-28**.

- Prayer:
 - Almighty, everlasting God, on this day you conquered death through your son and opened for us the path to eternal life. And so we celebrate in joy the feast of his resurrection. Make us new through your Spirit, so that we too may rise and walk in the light of life. We ask this through Jesus Christ.

¹ Ted Olsen, "The Beginning of Lent." *Christianity Today*. 2/19/99, <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/easter/lent.html>> , accessed 1/9/08.

² Sir Thomas Browne, "If Thou Could'st Empty All Thyself of Self." <<http://browne.classicauthors.net/Ifthou/>>, accessed 1/9/08.

³ D. Maddalena, "Devotions for Lent: Week Four." *Devotions for Lent*. Copyright 2001-2002, <<http://imby.net/easter/weekfour.html>>, accessed 1/9/08.

⁴ Much of this section was adapted from Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Show Me the Way* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1992), 100-101.

⁵ Nouwen, 120.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 127-8.

⁹ Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1707.

¹⁰ Nouwen, 134-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 137.