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# Becoming human:

CALLED AND SHAPED BY JESUS

## OVERALL THEME

What does it mean to be human?

Lent is the season of the church year in which we focus particular attention on foundational questions of our existence. This Lent season we invite you to ask: What does it mean for us to be the created and recreated images of God? How may we become *authentically* human?

This year's Lenten texts start us out at the very beginning—in the garden of Eden. Surely we can expect to see genuine humanity there. The first human couple, however, lets us down—so much choice, such great responsibility, so much freedom. Under the pressure of their first great test they relinquish their humanity, and the garden becomes a wasteland. It is in this wilderness that the corresponding Gospel text (Matthew 4:1-11) reveals a second new beginning. Here another human being—whom the Romans text calls the second *adam* (“human being”)—also faces enormous testing and pressure. This *adam* passes the test that the first human couple had failed. *Ecce homo!* (“Here is the man!” John 19:5). Behold genuine, authentic humanity.

In Year A of the churchwide lectionary, the assigned Gospel texts are primarily from the Gospel of John, though we do begin and end the season with texts from Matthew. It is important to keep an attentive eye to the trinitarian emphasis that binds together the texts of this season. Becoming authentically human is first and foremost about what God is doing. So we ask what it means to be images of the God who created us. What does it mean to be called by Jesus? What does it mean to be reshaped into the image of this Son of God who, with unparalleled authenticity, lived, died, and lives anew our true humanity? And what is the Spirit's role

within and among us? Because apart from the Spirit we are only dry bones or, at best, lifeless corpses (Ezekiel 37).

Becoming human is the work of Creator, Jesus and Spirit. Leave God out of the conversation, and we leave out far too much of ourselves. It is impossible to speak adequately of what it means to be human apart from God, because so much of who we are has to do with God. It is the trinitarian emphasis of our Lenten texts that prevents us from simply redoubling our own efforts to reclaim our authentic humanity.

We are surrounded by a host of pressures that would squeeze and contort us into less-than-human, even inhuman, shapes and disfigurements. Lent is a season to release that pressure, to repent of (turn from) all that would distort and reduce our humanity. It is a season of fasting in which we choose to abstain from food, or TV, or Facebook, or whatever other good thing may be holding our lives too tightly in its grip. Likewise, in this season we pay special attention to the Christian disciplines of prayer, solitude, Bible study, simplicity, and service. Yet we also remember that we cannot reshape ourselves. In themselves these disciplines do not reshape us; they do not restore our authentic humanity. They simply open up space in our lives for God to work. It is our Creator who will recreate us; it is Jesus whose own life, death, and resurrection call us and transform us into a new way of being human. We become human, indeed we are reborn, as the Spirit breathes life into us, a life that bursts forth from deep within like a stream of living water.

### Permission to photocopy

Subscribers to *Leader* are welcome to photocopy worship materials in this section.

We began by asking: Who am I? How can I become human? The answers lie in the most basic question of Christian faith: Who is Jesus? God has acted, and still acts, in Jesus—the serving, suffering, crucified, and risen One—to reshape into the image of the God who created us those who bear the name of Jesus. We become truly human only as we welcome and claim this redeeming work of Love in and for us. May these Lenten worship resources be a fitting instrument in God’s work to that end.

## GUIDELINES FOR WORSHIP PLANNING

Our Lenten texts are united by their repeated call for one particular response: *belief*. Consider each of the six weeks:

- 1 Are you feeling the pressure of severe testing? The second Adam believes God’s word and leads us out of the wilderness.
- 2 Is your life at a dead end? God’s promise to Abraham, Jesus’ promise to Nicodemus, and the Spirit’s promise to you is the same: Whoever believes in the Son will be born anew into eternal life, i.e., the life for which you were created, the truly human life.
- 3 Are you thirsty? Thirsty for *life*? Will you believe in the God who provides water from a rock to the thirsty Israelites? Will you believe in the Water of Life who restores the humanity of the tragically degraded and trampled Samaritan woman?
- 4 Believe in the Light of the World, who will open your eyes with the mud of new creation, no matter how dark the valley through which you pass.
- 5 Believe in the one who erases the stench of death, who makes even the driest of dry bones live.
- 6 Stand with the crowds on Palm Sunday and join them in asking the all-important question: Who is this? Ask this question in faith, believing, for this is truly *the* foundational question. We trust this question will accompany and guide you as you use these materials to lead your congregation in worship through Lent 2011.

### *Adapting these resources for your congregation:*

- Although these materials suggest an order of service, you should feel free to adapt the elements offered to suit your own worship context and tradition.
- Consider the possibilities for multigenerational participation. Visual elements, litanies, dramas, and

prayers are all opportunities to involve the different age groups in your congregation.

- Careful reading of the prayers, drama scripts, and hymn texts in this material, in addition to the sermon starters, will aid the preacher with images and ideas to be highlighted. The *Leader* website ([www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org)) includes a supplemental section with dramas and additional worship resources.
- Draw on gifts and abilities within your congregation. If you know a songwriter who has composed a song that really connects with your congregation’s Lenten journey, by all means use it! If someone has a great idea for a visual worship focus, use it, and send us a picture of what you’ve done. If the sermon is faithful and discerning and nothing like our suggested sermon starter, that’s fine.
- We hope, above all else, that our ideas can supplement and enhance the energy and creativity of your congregation as you listen to the Holy Spirit’s translation of this year’s texts into your context and situation.

## VISUAL ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

In keeping with the theme of Jesus calling and shaping us to become truly human, this year’s visuals suggestions include human arms reaching out to Jesus in ways that reflect each week’s focus statement. Artist Ray Dirks has offered our congregations six stunning pieces of photo art to use in a variety of ways. These images can be projected electronically without any additional text; themes can be added above, below, or superimposed on the image. Because of the color variation in the photo image, superimposing text can be challenging, but by providing a colored background fill, these images can also serve as background for projected music, sermon outlines, or reflection questions. We have provided a few PowerPoint slides to start your own creative process.

To develop banner possibilities, play with these images, using a program such as IrfanView/Image/Effects/Edge detection, or other visual editing programs. We have included one example of Edge detection in the PowerPoint, available online at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org). Finally, these images may be used for designing your own bulletins.

## MUSIC

Congregational music suggestions have been selected to fit with the following elements of the order of worship:

praising, confessing, hearing God's word, and sending. Each song connects with the day's focus statement and theme.

Although many congregations may find it difficult to resist singing at least a few Easter songs during Lent, songs referring to Jesus' resurrection have been reserved for the Easter season. Music for Lent has been chosen to help us travel the road toward the cross with Jesus.

## SCRIPTURE AND LITANIES

While the Scripture readings have helped to shape the litanies (available at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org)), they are not intended to replace the reading of the chosen Scriptures but rather to help congregations be in conversation with them. Whether or not your church purchases bulletin covers from Mennonite Publishing Network, we encourage you to print the Scripture references for the day, as well as those for the following Sunday, somewhere in each week's bulletin. This will encourage worshippers to use the Scriptures for personal devotions.

## CONFESSION AND WORDS OF ASSURANCE

At the time for confession of sin, in addition to reflection on individual sins (such as selfish actions or hurtful words), we suggest a broader view that considers our complicity in the systems of injustice that impede the implementation of God's will being done on earth, as it is in heaven. We also encourage a deeper view, one that dives beneath the surface to the attitudes and fears that lead to these individual and systemic sins. Do not be afraid of allowing from 30 to 60 seconds of silence for this kind of reflection, but let worshippers know what to expect and how to spend this time. Support the practice of silent reflection with the gesture of prayer with open hands, signifying letting go of the sin that clings to us.

Hands that have openly released their hold on sin also can help our hearts and minds receive the words of assurance on a bodily level. We have included a congregational response as part of the words of assurance and conclude with a hymn of praise for God's big forgiveness. A sung response offers another way of deepening the impact of confession and claiming the words of assurance. Inserting the offering at this place in the worship service could provide an additional way of responding to God's forgiving grace, though you may want to save this form of response until after the proclamation of God's word.

## TESTIMONIES

The powerful narratives of personal transformation in the Lent readings invite the sharing of stories of personal struggle and transformation by the congregation. We have prepared guiding questions for testimonies, emerging from the worship texts and themes. Our hope is that worshippers will learn to see their own experiences of distress and longing as a way God is present with us, and be able to claim their darkness as well as their times of enlightenment as parts of the same journey with and toward God.

The Indian philosopher Tagore once wrote: "Faith is the bird that sings while the dawn is still dark." We hope and pray that times of testimony in worship can be a bird that teaches the church to sing holistically about our journeys of faith with the somber, the even-keeled, and the joyous notes of our lived experience. Use the questions provided in the worship outline to interview a person from your congregation or as guidance for that person's testimony preparation. We encourage those preparing a testimony to keep their responses short, about 100 words. This discipline can actually strengthen the clarity and impact of what is said and can help maintain a healthy balance between focusing on God and our response to God.

## DRAMA AND CHILDREN'S TIME

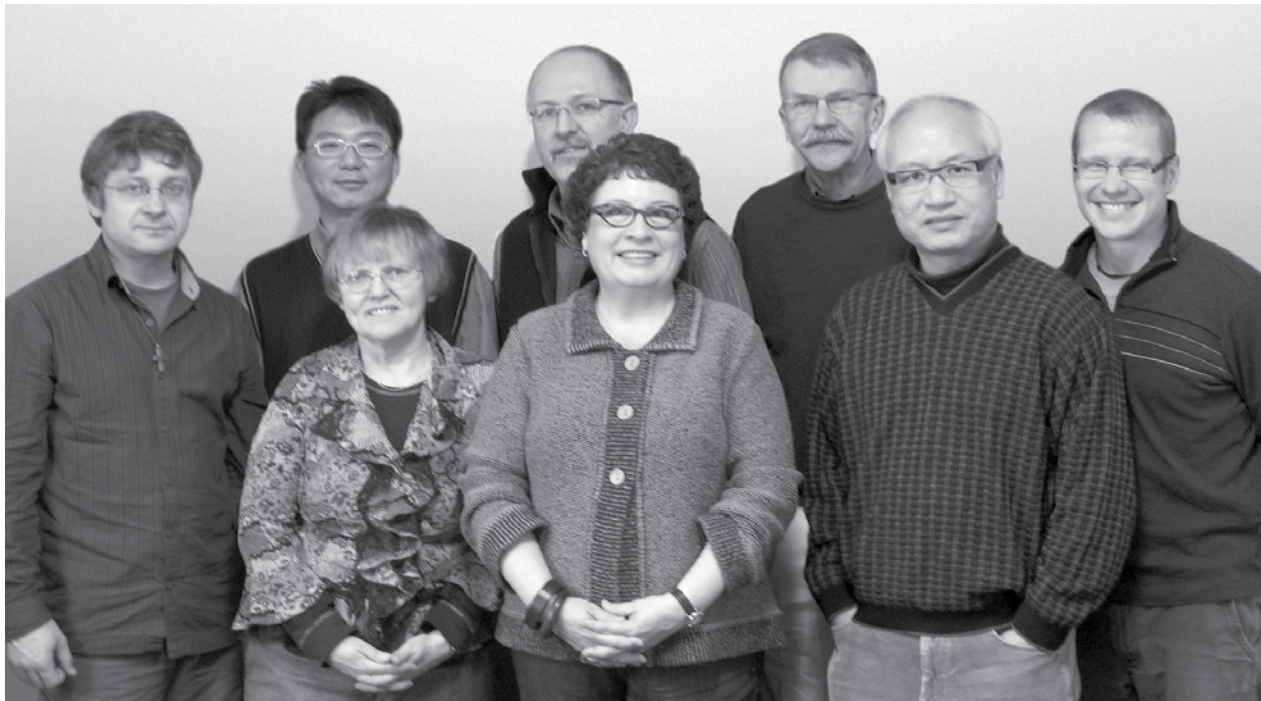
For each Sunday during Lent, we offer a dramatic encounter, to be followed by a children's story. A color for each Sunday, which implies the theme of the day, will be used to focus the children's responses to the drama. We encourage the actors to wear these colors as is appropriate to the script. Another option is to use a "book of colors" as a visual focus for the children's reflection time. This booklet could be made out of six pieces of construction paper; one in each color. Each page would be folded in half, the short way. The back of half of each paper would be glued onto the next color, which would be glued to the next. Finally the stack of five colors would get glued into the green paper, which would serve as the cover.

The dramatic encounters have been written as dialogues between Jesus and some of the people who met him. During the children's time, reflect on the drama with questions, using either the ones we've offered or your own. Encourage the children to express what they think about the characters in the drama and share their questions with friends, teachers, and parents after the service. We pray these stories will help people of all ages come closer to Jesus.

	Drama [Encounters: Jesus meets humans]	Children's Story [Colors of Lent]
L1. Shaped by Testing	Jesus to the Tempter/Adam	Dark Blue: sin, temptation, darkness
L2. Shaped by New Birth	Jesus to Nicodemus	Brown doubt, unknowing, dryness
L3. Shaped Through Thirst	Jesus to a Samaritan woman	Red: thirsty, desire, eagerness, passion
L4. Called to Light	Jesus to a blind man	Yellow: light
L5. Called to Life	Jesus to Martha/Lazarus	Purple: royalty, pain, suffering, anticipation of resurrection
L5. Called to Life	Jesus to the crowds	Green: hope of newness, peace

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

You will find services for Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, and Good Friday online at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org). Also appearing is a family oriented booklet for at-home worship that is adapted from these resources and an article on other spiritual disciplines you may want to practice during Lent.



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## First Sunday in Lent

# Shaped by Testing



**Text:** Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, Psalm 32, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### Song suggestions:

HWB 16	<i>God is here among us</i>	STJ 75	<i>Be still</i>
HWB 78	<i>Ehane he'ama (Father God, you are holy)</i>	STS 61	<i>O God, to whom then shall I turn?</i>
HWB 551	<i>In the stillness of the evening</i>	STS 62	<i>Create in me a clean heart</i>
HWB 553	<i>I am weak and I need thy strength</i>	STS 65	<i>Abre mis ojos (Open my eyes)</i>
STJ 57	<i>Mayenziwe (Your will be done)</i>		

## WE GATHER

### Invocation and Call to Worship:

Leader: Sing together! Celebrate God!

**People: God protects us from all our trouble.**

Leader: God forgives us and covers our sins.

**People: God surrounds us with songs of deliverance.**

**All: Therefore let all God's people pray with thanksgiving and worship God.**

### Gathering Songs

#### Confession:

Lord, our desire for control has separated us from you.  
In our stubborn independence, we have turned from your love.  
We hide our failure and guilt, yet we feel their weight both day and night.  
Here and now ... we acknowledge our sins before you and reveal our transgressions.  
We confess to the Lord ...

#### Silent prayer:

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven.  
*Our slate is wiped clean.*  
*We are free to follow Jesus in obedience*  
*and experience love in every test. Amen.*

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)

## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### ***Benediction:***

Leader: Many are the woes of the wicked,

**People: but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds those who trust in God.**

Leader: Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous.

**People: Sing, all you who have been forgiven!**

**All: For the Lord's unfailing love surrounds those who trust in God.**

### ***Sermon Starters for "Shaped by Testing"***

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7, Psalm 32, Romans 5:12-19, Matthew 4:1-11

Lent is a season of testing. This is the theme of the Genesis and Matthew texts. The 40 days of Lent correspond to Jesus' 40 days of testing in the wilderness. Two questions lie at the heart of our testing: What do we really want? and Who are we?

#### *What do we really want?*

Testing reveals our inner essence, the alignment of our souls—what, under everything else, makes us tick. Lent is a time to reflect on our appetites and desires. In Adam's, Eve's and Jesus' testing their true passions are revealed. In both experiences desirable options and, on the surface, legitimate desires are presented by the tempter. Here the preacher can explore matters that powerfully push and pull on our souls and then point to the centeredness that can be found in listening to the voice of God.

#### *Who are we?*

This is how the tempter began his work on Jesus. "If you are the Son of God ..." This question echoes the affirmation that came from God the Father at Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Will we, children created in the image of God, use our perilous gift of choice to affirm and strengthen our identity as daughters and sons of God? Here the preacher could explore how we can hear God's voice of affirmation and word of liberation as we face temptation.

### ***Dramas and the Related Children's Time:***

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton's Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A (78-79), © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### ***Testimony***

#### *Guiding questions:*

- 1 Life is full of experiences of challenge and testing. Tell us an experience of testing in your life. How did you handle the testing?
  - 2 What was the positive impact this testing had in your life?
  - 3 How does this test shape the way you see Jesus?
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## Second Sunday in Lent

# Shaped by New Birth



**Text:** Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, John 3:1-17

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### Song suggestions:

HWB 327 <i>Great is thy faithfulness</i>	STJ 2	<i>Hamba nathi (Come, walk with us)</i>
HWB 356 <i>Breathe on me, breath of God</i>	STJ 73	<i>The Lord lift you up</i>
HWB 395 <i>Here I am, Lord</i>	STJ 78	<i>Sizohamba naye (We will walk with God)</i>
HWB 527 <i>Lord Jesus, think on me (vv. 1 &amp; 2)</i>	STS 56	<i>Unless a grain of wheat</i>

*A new heart*, from the CD, *A New Heart*, by Bryan Moyer Suderman, 2009, available from [www.smalltallmusic.com](http://www.smalltallmusic.com).

## WE GATHER

### Invocation and Call to Worship:

**Leader:** Lift up your eyes to the hills—where does your help come from?

**People:** **Our help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.**

**All:** *Let us worship our God, who watches over us now and always.*

### Gathering Songs

#### Confession:

Lord, we need new birth.  
Paralyzed by doubts, dead in our stubbornness and guilt,  
walking in blindness, our hearts are hardened to your love.  
We confess to the Lord ...

#### Silent prayer:

Jesus, you have come to put the world right,  
to give life to the dead,  
and to call into existence a people born from above.

*Break in by your creating Spirit.*

*Send forth your fresh wind.*

*And open the way to real life, eternal life. Amen.*

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)

## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### ***Benediction:***

Leader: The Lord watch over you—

**People: The Lord bless you and make you a blessing;**

Leader: The sun will not harm you by day,

**People: Nor the moon by night.**

**All: The Lord will bring you to life and carry you safely home.**

### ***Sermon Starters for “Shaped by New Birth”***

Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4:1-5, 13-17, John 3:1-17

At the heart of the texts for the second Sunday of Lent is the call to believe. The preacher’s challenge here is to clear away the accumulated fakeries of superficial “believe-ism” and to uncover the kind of believing that opens us to the kingdom.

In the Genesis text, Abram and Sarai are surprised by a new and awesome promise. Note how many times God is the subject, the One who will make this promise work. In response, Abram (and Sarai) “went as the Lord had told [them].” Their belief is made evident as they pack their bags to begin their long journey of faith. In doing so, they become the mother and father of all who believe.

Romans 4 argues theologically that believing is the key for participating in God’s righteousness.

Psalm 121 asks, “From where will my help come?” This is the question of all who seek God. The answer? Not from the hills, where the Baals were thought to dwell, but from God, “who made heaven and earth.”

John 3 is a classic text on believing and serves well as the primary preaching text for this Sunday. Nicodemus’ struggle is also our struggle. On the threshold of believing we ask, How can these things be? How can we become new? How can I experience transformation into the image of Jesus? How can I be truly human as God intended?

Interpretation of this text has traditionally been focused on those outside the family of faith, who need to be born again. Preachers should be aware that the teaching of this text was given to a seasoned practitioner of orthodoxy. It presents believing as more than a formulaic event or mere creedal assent, but as transformative. Belief shapes, so much so that Jesus calls it being “born again.”

### ***Dramas and the Related Children’s Time:***

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton’s Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A, (82-83), © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### ***Testimony***

*Guiding questions:*

- 1 When someone encounters Jesus, he or she will not be the same person. Briefly share with the congregation how this transformation happened to you. Why did this encounter with Jesus make such a dramatic difference in your life?
- 2 Have you ever doubted whether your new birth in Christ is real? Why or why not?
- 3 As a reborn person, in what way has your worldview been transformed in relation to such things as wealth, success, family, etc?



## Third Sunday in Lent

# Shaped through Thirst

**Text:** Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### Song suggestions:

HWB 55	<i>Cantemos al Señor (Let's sing unto the Lord)</i>	STJ 49	<i>Rain down</i>
HWB 68	<i>O come, loud anthems let us sing</i>	STJ 82	<i>Water has held us</i>
HWB 474	<i>I hunger and I thirst</i>	STJ 77	<i>The peace of the earth be with you</i>
HWB 495	<i>O let all who thirst</i>	STS 50	<i>Woza nomthwalo wakho</i>
HWB 582	<i>Guide me O, thou great Jehovah</i>		<i>(Come, bring your burdens to God)</i>

*I can hear your message, from the CD, A New Heart, by Bryan Moyer Suderman, 2009, available from [www.smalltallmusic.com](http://www.smalltallmusic.com).*

## WE GATHER

### Invocation and Call to Worship:

Leader: Come, let us bow down in worship.

**People:** **Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;**

Leader: For the Lord is our God,

**People:** **We are the people of God's pasture,**

**All:** ***We are the flock under God's care.***

### Gathering Songs

#### Confession:

Lord, we long for living water. We thirst for life.

And yet,

we have drunk deeply of resentment;

we have savored self-centeredness.

We confess to the Lord ...

#### Silent prayer:

Today, O God,

let us hear your voice.

*Give us this living water*

*so we may never thirst again. Amen.*

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)



## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### ***Benediction:***

Leader: Like water poured out on a thirsty land,

**People: May the Lord pour out the Holy Spirit on us.**

Leader: May we blossom with new life.

**All: May we bring refreshment and joy to others.**

### ***Sermon Starters for “Shaped Through Thirst”***

Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11, John 4:5-42

Thirst speaks of longing and serious need. Without water all living things, including humans, die. In both Exodus 17 and John 4, thirst is the driving need and becomes the central metaphor for the heart-need of humans, created in the image of God—a relationship with the living God.

Answering to our thirst for God is the portrayal in Romans 5 of the love of God: “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” The moving of God’s heart of love in response to our brokenness and need are expressed in Psalm 95. God’s hurt and anger at the faithlessness of the Israelites at Meribah are expressions of passionate love.

Jesus’ thirst begins the story of the thirsty Samaritan woman in John 4. Here we see the God-man in his deep identification with us, thirsty humans. The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a sensitive, step-by-step unfolding of God’s love and grace. She is as disqualified as she could be, according to moral and religious scruples. Yet she is the one to whom Jesus first revealed himself as “the living water.”

How are our thirsts supplied through “the living water”?

### ***Dramas and the Related Children’s Time:***

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton’s Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A, (84-85), © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### ***Testimony***

*Guiding questions:*

- 1 I know that you have a story about your longing for God. Could you tell us a bit about that?
  - 2 How did your spiritual thirst come to be satisfied? How much was a result of your own hard work, and how much was a result of God’s providence?
  - 3 In what ways do you experience Jesus daily as your living water?
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## Fourth Sunday in Lent

# Called to Light



**Text:** 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### **Song suggestions:**

HWB 216 <i>Christ, whose glory fills the skies</i>	STJ 5	<i>Come and be light for our eyes</i>
HWB 352 <i>Gentle Shepherd, come and lead us</i>	STJ 76	<i>The Lord bless you and keep you</i>
HWB 578 <i>The Lord's my shepherd</i>	STS 5	<i>Open my ears, open my eyes</i>
HWB 645 <i>Each morning brings us</i>	STS 65	<i>Abre mis ojos (Open my eyes)</i>

## WE GATHER

### **Invocation and Call to Worship:**

Leader: The Lord is our shepherd.

**People: We shall not want.**

Leader: God makes us lie down in green pastures.

**People: We shall not want.**

Leader: God leads us beside quiet waters.

**People: We shall not want.**

**All: Restore us through your Holy Spirit, the love of Jesus Christ, and the comfort of your presence.**

### **Gathering Songs**

#### **Confession:**

Lord, we long for light, but all is darkness and we walk in deep shadows.

We have driven back justice.

Truth has stumbled in the streets,  
and thick darkness is over the people.

We confess our deeds of darkness.

We confess to the Lord ...

#### **Silent prayer:**

As everything exposed to the light becomes visible,  
we walk from darkness into light.

*Open our eyes, Jesus,  
that our lives may radiate your glory. Amen.*

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)

## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### ***Benediction:***

Leader: Go forth and shine, for the Light has come,

**People: and the glory of the Lord rises upon us.**

Leader: Surely goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives,

**All: and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

### ***Sermon Starters for “Called to Light”***

1 Samuel 16:1-13, Psalm 23, Ephesians 5:8-14, John 9:1-41

The power of light to stimulate life is dramatically revealed around us as the Lenten season unfolds. Buds swell with promise, birds start to nest, and all of nature begins to be transformed. Like daffodil bulbs and birch trees, we are phototropic. We were created to be light-responsive.

The tension between light and darkness underlies this Sunday’s texts. In the Samuel text, only the light of God’s guidance through the prophet Samuel brings discernment in selecting David as God’s anointed king. Psalm 23 celebrates the light of God’s protection and care even in “the valley of the shadow of death.” Ephesians 5 lays out the ethical power of light. As we turn to the light, we turn away from the works and deeds of darkness.

What happens when light penetrates darkness? The answer is dramatically revealed in John 9, in the story of the healing of the man born blind. The climax of the drama occurs sometime after the healing. The formerly blind man sees Jesus for the first time, and Jesus reveals himself with the words, “I am he!” Jesus is the “Son of Man,” the One who is fully human. The man exclaims: “I believe!” and worships him.

The one who claimed “I am the light of the world” heals, confronts darkness, and searches out the outcasts.

This remarkable story graphically uncovers the varieties and stages of encounter with the light in the life of each of the characters. Some turn away from the light, but the blind man experiences healing through the light, not only in his eyes but also in his soul.

### ***Dramas and the Related Children’s Time:***

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton’s Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A, (87-88), © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### ***Testimony***

*Guiding questions:*

- 1 You once lived in darkness, so to speak, and knew no direction in your life. Please share with us what that was like for you.
- 2 It is said that an encounter with Jesus brings light into your soul. Could you tell us some of the ways Jesus opened your eyes to help you find your future?
- 3 How do you now seek God’s guidance in everyday situations?

## Fifth Sunday in Lent

# Called to Life



**Text:** Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### **Song suggestions:**

HWB 16	<i>God is here among us</i>	STJ 5	<i>Come and be light for our eyes</i>
HWB 26	<i>Holy Spirit, come with power</i>	STJ 35	<i>O Breath of life</i>
HWB 46	<i>I sing the mighty power of God</i>	STS 59	<i>From ashes to the living fount</i>
HWB 299	<i>New earth, heavens new</i>	STS 111	<i>For me to live is Christ</i>
HWB 584	<i>They that wait upon the Lord</i>		

*I will trust in you*, from the CD, *A New Heart*, by Bryan Moyer Suderman, 2009, available from [www.smalltallmusic.com](http://www.smalltallmusic.com).

## WE GATHER

### **Invocation and Call to Worship:**

Leader: Out of the depths we cry to you.

**People:** **O Lord, hear our cry.**

Leader: If you kept a record of sins, who would stand a chance?

**People:** **O Lord, hear our cry.**

Leader: But with you there is forgiveness.

**All:** ***We wait for you, O Lord. We hope in your word. Blessed be your name.***

### **Gathering Songs**

#### **Confession:**

Lord, our lives are dry bones.  
We are cruel in our words  
and indifferent in our actions.  
We confess to the Lord ...

#### **Silent prayer:**

Breathe on us, Lord.  
Put your Spirit within us  
and make us alive.  
***We place our hope in you. Amen.***

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)

## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### *Benediction:*

Leader: Put your hope in the Lord.

**People: The Lord is unfailing love,**

Leader: and with him is full redemption.

**People: He will bring us up from our graves.**

**All: God will redeem us from all our sins.**

### *Sermon Starters for “Called to Life”*

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

These texts confront the denial of death that is endemic to North American culture. They plunge us into the great paradox of Lent: that we must face death in order to find life. The valley of the dry bones, the psalmist’s cry “out of the depths,” and Lazarus’ death provide dramatic images of death. The “very dry” state of the bones in Ezekiel and the bad smell at Lazarus’ tomb depict the hopelessness that accompanies death.

This hopelessness needs confronting. Too often we preach about death only at funerals. These texts provide an opportunity to engage the “out of the depths” nature of death with our people, and through that process to find hope.

Paradoxically, good news from this confrontation of death is found in each text. Ezekiel’s dry bones come to life. Wildly unbelievable words of hope from God are given to hope-starved Israel by the prophet: “I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live ...”

The life-giving presence of the Spirit in the lives of believers is affirmed and celebrated in Romans 8:11: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies ...”

The climax of the Lazarus story is Jesus’ self-revelation: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.”

### *Dramas and the Related Children’s Time:*

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton’s Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A, (89-90), © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### *Testimony*

*Guiding questions:*

- 1 Have you ever experienced dryness or hopelessness in your life? Could you tell us some details about that experience?
- 2 How did God enter your situation and make a shift from dryness to abundance?
- 3 If there is no “dead end” in the life of those who put their trust in God, then, from your experience, in what ways can God help us to make a U-turn?

## Sixth Sunday in Lent – Palm Sunday

# Called to Worship



**Text:** Isaiah 50:4-9a, Psalm 31:9-16, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 21:1-11

*(Congregational responses appear in bold italics.)*

### **Song suggestions:**

HWB 19 *Open now thy gates of beauty*

HWB 51 *Let the whole creation cry*

HWB 238 *Hosanna, loud hosanna*

HWB 239 *Ride on, ride on in majesty*

HWB 333 *Christ, who is in the form of God*

HWB 439 *I want Jesus to walk with me*

HWB 530 *What wondrous love is this*

STJ 75 *Be still*

STS 75 *Heri ni jina (Blessed be the name)*

STS 113 *I will stand in the congregation*

*Infiltrating the world*, from the CD, *A New Heart*, by Bryan Moyer Suderman, 2009, available from [www.smalltallmusic.com](http://www.smalltallmusic.com).

## WE GATHER

### **Invocation and Call to Worship:**

Leader: This is the day the Lord has made.

**People: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Leader: Let us rejoice in all our Lord has done,

**All: for it is marvelous in our eyes. Hosanna! We bless the One who comes in the name of the Lord!**

### **Gathering Songs**

#### **Confession:**

Lord, we are isolated and alone,  
our failures are visible for all to see.

Our days pour out like sand,  
our years fade and are gone.

We are afraid to hope.

We confess to the Lord ...

#### **Silent prayer:**

Lord, we trust in you.  
Redeem us now, we pray.

*To you, Lord, we commit all our hope and all our worship. Amen.*

Hymn of Praise

## WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

(Read Scripture, experience the drama, children's time, sermon)

## WE RESPOND

(Testimony, offering, announcements, hymn of response and/or sending)

### ***Benediction:***

Leader: Love God, you who are God's holy people,

**All:** *for God's love endures forever.*

Leader: Praise God, and give thanks,

**All:** *for God's love endures forever.*

Leader: Expect God, and welcome God's grace,

**All:** *for God's love endures forever.*

### ***Sermon Starters for "Called to Worship"***

Matthew 21:1-11

"The Triumphal Entry," as it has been called, begins the drama of Holy Week. The drama swirls around the question: Who is he? Matthew 21:10 reports: "When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, 'Who is this?'" This is the question at his trial, and it is the question the centurion will address at the crucifixion: "Truly this man was God's Son!" (Matthew 27:54).

These questions explore aspects of the central issue of Jesus' identity:

- How did Jesus' riding through the city gates on the donkey answer this question?
- Who truly welcomed Jesus? Did the crowd? Did anyone?
- What were the expectations of Jesus by the crowd? By his followers?
- What are our expectations?

The preacher could reflect on each of the ways Jesus has been portrayed through the Lenten texts and see how these revelations, including the "I am" statements, have led to the present moment.

It is important to help the congregation feel the power and danger of the question of Jesus' identity in order to enter the crisis of Holy Week and to prepare for both the crucifixion and the resurrection.

### ***Dramas and the Related Children's Time:***

*These resources are available on the Leader website. If you decide not to use the dramas, consider retelling the gospel story as presented in Ralph Milton's Lectionary Story Bible, Cycle A, (91-92), or tell the passion story as it continues on pages 93-97, © 2007 Ralph Milton, published by Woodlake Books.*

### ***Testimony***

*Guiding questions:*

- 1 Someone (A. W. Tozer) once said that "worship is the missing jewel of the church." As a worship participant/leader, what do you think about this comment?
- 2 If "who Jesus is" represents a central theme of worship, how does this fact make worship personally meaningful and acceptable to God?
- 3 Based on what you have just said, please tell us about a particularly unforgettable worship experience you have had.