

Recognizing Infinite Love

La Sierra University Church • Riverside, California • February 9-23, 2008

Preparing

Since the fourth century, many Christians have observed the forty days before Resurrection Day as a time of concentrated spiritual reflection, traditionally known as Lent. The period of forty days was probably encouraged by similar periods in the lives of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. This year the forty days began on February 6. To encourage your own reflection during this season, here is a short poem, "Retreat," from Into the Great Green Heart of God (by Christine Rodgers):

Once again
I drop
down
into the silence
silence
that seems
to come
from the
bottom
of the earth
or straight
from the
heart of God.

Inviting

After the organ prelude, the pastoral host says:

In the name of our infinitely loving God,
our Source, Salvation, and Sustenance—

Please join in reading the words in bold type:

Amen.

The pastor makes necessary announcements,
then continues:

God loved the world in such a way
that he gave his unique Son,
so that whoever trusts in him
will not perish but have everlasting life.

God's love is universal!

God sent the Son into the world
not to condemn the world
but to save the world through him.

God's love is unconditional!

God's steadfast love endures forever,
God's faithfulness to all generations.

God's love is unending!

The congregation is invited stand and join in singing
these words to the tune of hymn 191 ("Beecher"):

**Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
Fix in us a humble dwelling,
all your faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, you are all compassion;
pure, unbounded love impart.
Visit us with your salvation,
enter every trembling heart.**

Please remain standing as the pastor prays:

Loving God, may the presence of your Spirit
be real to us and crown our worship.
May we see in each other the mystery of heaven.
May our joys be deep and our sorrows be sacred.
May angels protect us now and forever
from the demons that would poison our hearts,

Amen.

Please be seated.

Praying

After several moments for reflection,
the service leader begins:

We confess, dear God, the unhealthy bonds
that keep us tied where we should be free.

**Separate us from what binds,
so that we may love without brokenness
those who are broken.**

We confess our tendency to focus
on the errors of others,
and our instinct to condemn.

**Teach us the peace of forgiveness;
release us from the hell of resentment.**

We confess the walls that separate us
from our brothers and sisters, from ourselves,
and from you.

**Melt forever the thoughts and feelings
that keep us curved in on ourselves.
Amen.**

*Please remain seated as the cantor sings these words
to the tune of hymn 156 ("Passion Chorale"):*

O God, how we have wandered
and hidden from your face—
In foolishness have squandered
your legacy of grace.
Grant now that our transgressing,
our faithlessness may cease.
Stretch out your hand in blessing,
in pardon, and in peace.

*After several moments for reflection, the service leader
may remind the congregation of special blessings,
needs, and concerns, and then says:*

I invite you to kneel.

Loving God, in a world so unsure that we know not
where to find the safety we seek,
recall us to the transcendent and eternal.

Teach us to live your love.

In silence let us each pray
for a member of our congregation.

Please pray silently for several moments.

Loving God, may all who suffer feel less pain;
may misery diminish and disease recede.

Teach us to live your love.

In silence let us each pray
for someone in special need.

Please pray silently for several moments.

Loving God, protect from harm and fear
the children of the world—our own and all others.

Teach us to live your love.

In silence let us each pray for a child we know.

Please pray silently for several moments.

Loving God, send miracles
to the war zones of the world,
so that violence and terror may depart.

Teach us to live your love.

In silence let us each pray for the leaders
of peoples and governments.

Please pray silently for several moments.

Now let us join in the prayer Jesus taught us:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from the evil one.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours now and forever.
Amen.**

Please be seated.

Listening

The first reader prays:

May your word, O God, be to each of us
a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.

Amen.

Listen for God's word to you today in the words of
_____, chapter __, verses __ to __.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words.

*After several moments of silence
for reflection on the reading, the pastor says:*

I invite you to join in reading responsively
from Psalm ____, on the sheet
that accompanied your printed liturgy.

*After several moments of silence
for reflection on the Psalm, the second reader prays:*

May your word, O God,
make us wise toward salvation
as we trust in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

Listen for God's word to you today in the words of
the Letter to the Romans,
chapter __, verses __ to __.

After the reading:

This ends the reading.

Thanks be to God for these words.

*After time for reflection, the cantor sings these words
to the tune of hymn 155 ("Rockingham Old"):*

O Love, how vast, how flowing free
O Love, how filled with ecstasy,
That God a human form should take

And mortal be for mortals' sake.
Please join the cantor in singing a second stanza:

**Then for God's boundless love sing praise
Through endless ages, countless days.
By love we have been reconciled:
Salvation gained through God's own Child.**

The service leader says:

I invite you to stand to hear the Gospel.

We know, O God, that we do not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from you.

Amen

Listen for God's word to you today in the words of
the Gospel according to _____,
chapter __, verses __ to __.

After the reading:

The gospel of Jesus Christ!

Thanks be to God for the gospel.

Please be seated.

Giving

*After several moments of silence for reflection
on the Gospel reading, the service leader says:*

With gratitude and gladness let us present to God
our tithes, our offerings, and ourselves.

**What we give now, Loving God, is a symbol
of our gratitude for your goodness,
and our recognition that everything we have
is a gift of your grace.**

Amen.

The offering is received from the congregation.

Singing

*After the offering is received,
the cantor or service leader says:*

I invite you to stand and join in singing hymn ____.

After the hymn, please remain standing

Considering

The homilist prays:

May our hearts be cleansed
and thus be made new.
May we be freed from the past
and open to better things.

Amen.

Please be seated.

*The homilist briefly expounds the meaning
of one or more of the Scripture readings.*

Affirming

*After several moments of silent reflection on the homily,
the service leader says:*

Let us join in a contemporary affirmation
of historic Christian faith:

We believe in one God,

who made us all,
and who infuses our lives with transcendence.

We believe in God's revelation,

in the divine handiwork of nature,
in the written Word that tells us
of the Incarnate Word,
and in the voice of the Spirit in every human heart.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's unique Son,

in whom we see most clearly God's love and justice,
to which, by which, and for which we are called.

**We believe in Jesus the Messiah,
through whom we become new people,**

called beyond the consequences of our brokenness
and lifted to the fullness of life.

**We believe that by the power of the Holy Spirit
Jesus was born of Mary,**

a sign to the ages of the place of womanhood
in God's plan of salvation.

**We believe that he grew as we grow
through all the stages of life,**

subject to the pressures of evil
but never straying from the mind of God.

We believe that Jesus died for our benefit,

so that we might live with new heart,
mind, and strength.

**We believe that on the third day
he rose again from the tomb,**

and rose also in those who knew and loved him,
and in each of us,
to change life for all of us thereafter.

**We believe that he ascended into the life of God,
yet is still with us and for us,**

judging what has gone before and what is yet to come,
until the time of final revelation
when all of life will be gathered unto God.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the continuing breath of God on earth,**
who makes Christ present to those yet in darkness
and gives energy to those yet searching and weary.

**We believe the Spirit has spoken to us
through prophets and apostles,**
giving new meaning to the Word throughout time.

We believe in the community of faith,
sons and daughters of God who know they are
bound together by a love
that is larger than themselves.

**We believe that we need forgiveness
in the face of our frailties**
and forgiveness from the compulsions
of our disordered lives.

**We believe in life that is eternal
in ways we cannot dream,**
trusting in the love that will not let us go
and will go on creating forever.

Alleluia! Amen!

*The congregation is invited to stand and join in singing
another stanza to the tune of hymn 191:*

**Finish, then, your new creation,
pure and spotless may be prove.
Let us see your great salvation
perfectly restored in love.**

**Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place.
Crowned as saints, we ever shall be
lost in wonder, love, and praise.**

Please remain standing

Reflecting

The pastor prays:

Loving God, as we wake up each morning
during the coming week,
may your Spirit come upon us,
may our minds receive your word,
may our souls receive your blessing,
and may our hearts receive your love.

Amen.

*After the organ chimes, please be seated and remain in prayer
until the conclusion of the postlude.*

Blessing

The pastor says:

May all those we meet this week be better for it.
May we contribute peace.
May we serve God's purposes of love
with all we say and do.
May God show us how.

Amen.

This liturgy is compiled from Biblical and contemporary sources. The prayers are adapted from Illuminated Prayers by Marianne Williamson (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). The affirmation is adapted from a paraphrase of the Apostles' Creed in the book In Search of Belief by Joan Chittister (Ligouri, Mo.: Ligouri/Triumph, 1999).

Scripture Readings for Coming Sabbaths

Introspection (Lent)

February 9	Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	<i>Psalm 32</i>	Romans 5:12-18	Matthew 4:1-11
February 16	Genesis 12:1-4a	<i>Psalm 121</i>	Romans 4:1-5,13-17	John 3:1-17
February 23	Exodus 17:1-7	<i>Psalm 95</i>	Romans 5:1-11	John 4:5-15
March 1	1 Samuel 16:1-13	<i>Psalm 23</i>	Ephesians 5:8-14	John 9:1-11
March 8	Ezekiel 37:1-14	<i>Psalm 130</i>	Romans 8:6-11	John 11:1-7,17-27
March 15	Isaiah 50:4-9a	<i>Psalm 31:9-16</i>	Philippians 2:5-11	Matthew 27:27-31,45-54

Resurrection (Easter)

March 22	Jeremiah 31:1-6	<i>Psalm 118:1-2,14-24</i>	Colossians 3:1-4	John 20:1-18
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