

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT A

February 22, 2026

ON THIS FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT, ONCE AGAIN WE HEAR THE STORY OF THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS.

ONCE AGAIN, WE MARK THE STEPS FROM ASHES TO EASTER.

AND MAYBE ONCE AGAIN WE REALIZE THAT ASH WEDNESDAY WAS ONLY FOUR DAYS AGO, AND WE'VE ALREADY FAILED AT OUR LENTEN RESOLUTIONS!

BUT WE ARE NOT MEANT TO ENDURE LENT AS IF IT WERE A MIGRAINE HEADACHE OR AN OBSTACLE COURSE.

LENT—THE NAME MEANS SPRINGTIME—INVITES US TO NEW LIFE, TO BEAR FRUIT, THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR GOD'S KINGDOM.

WE KNOW THAT UNDER THE BLANKET OF SNOW, WITH MORE ON THE HORIZON TODAY, THE SOIL AWAITS THE TIME OF PREPARATION AND PLANTING.

LIKE GOOD GARDENERS, WE PREPARE THE SOIL, ROOT OUT WEEDS, PLANT NEW SEEDS, WATER THEM, SO THAT ARID AND DESERT PLACES OF OUR SOULS MIGHT BLOOM.

HENCE OUR LENTEN DISCIPLINES OF PRAYER,
FASTING, AND ALMSGIVING.

BUT IF THAT LENTEN DISCIPLINE IS MERE DRUDGERY
AND OBLIGATION, IF OUR LENTEN SPRINGTIME HAS
NEITHER JOY NOR INSPIRATION IN IT, THEN HOW WILL WE
REJOICE, WITH LAUGHTER IN OUR SOUL, COME EASTER?

OUR SIMPLE LENTEN LITURGIES—ENTERING TO
“HOLY GROUND,” NO GLORIA, A COMMON PSALM
RESPONSE, NO ALLELUIA, KNEELING FOR THE
PENITENTIAL RITE, CHANTING THE RESPONSE TO OUR
PETITIONS, SINGING THE OUR FATHER, KEEPING LONGER
SILENCE AFTER COMMUNION—OFFER A KIND OF
PREPARATION OF THE SOIL OF OUR SOULS, A WEEDING OUT
OF THE OLD, A PLANTING OF NEW SEEDS, SO WE MIGHT
ENCOUNTER MORE RICHLY THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S
PRESENCE IN OUR MIDST.

LENT MEANS TO REMIND US ANEW, NOT JUST THAT
WE ARE ASHES AND SHALL RETURN TO ASHES, BUT MUCH
MORE DEEPLY, THAT BEYOND THE ASHES OF THE GRAVE IS
JOY, THE PROMISED RESURRECTED LIFE WITH THE RISEN
LORD JESUS.

LENT SEEKS TO BE A KIND OF FIRST HARVEST OF CHRIST'S ABIDING WORD TO HIS DISCIPLES ON THE EVE OF HIS PASSION:

“I HAVE TOLD YOU ALL THIS SO THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE.”

NATURE HAS WRITTEN INTO OUR BODIES THE GENETIC CODE THAT MAKES POSSIBLE OUR HEIGHT AND COLOR OF OUR HAIR, AND EVEN WHAT DISEASES WE'LL BE PRONE TO—AND SO OUR MORTAL RETURN TO ASHES.

BUT DEEPER THAN THAT, GOD HAS PLACED IN US ANOTHER POTENTIAL—GOD'S OWN DREAMS AND DESIRES FOR US, THAT WE LIVE FOREVER, JOYFULLY, IN THE VERY HEART OF THE TRINITY. GOD HAS PLACED IN US THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE FOR OR AGAINST THOSE DIVINE DESIRES; FOR THROUGH THOSE CHOICES, WE WILL BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD'S KINGDOM.

OR MAYBE NOT!

LIKE JESUS IN THE GOSPEL TODAY, WE HAVE TO CHOOSE WHAT WE WILL LET COME TO FRUITION AND BLOSSOM IN THE SOIL OF OUR SOUL---GOOD FRUIT FOR THE REIGN OF GOD? OR WEEDS THAT CHOKE THAT FRUIT AND DISFIGURE THE GARDEN'S BEAUTY?

SATAN TEMPTS JESUS TO TURN STONES INTO BREAD.
JESUS MUST CHOOSE. WILL HE BE A MAGICIAN AND
MANIPULATOR?

OR A MAN, A HUMAN BEING, WHO HUNGERS AND
THIRSTS LIKE THE REST OF US, WHO HAS TO TOIL AND
LABOR FOR HIS FOOD, LIKE THE REST OF US?

SATAN CHALLENGES JESUS TO THROW HIMSELF
DOWN FROM THE HEIGHTS; AND IN THE PROCESS TO
TRADE ON HIS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER,
TO TAKE GOD FOR GRANTED. THAT WAS ONE OF ISRAEL'S
HISTORIC BESETTING SINS.

JESUS MUST CHOOSE.

WILL HE BE A CHARLATAN AND A SHOW-OFF, OR A
SUFFERING SERVANT?

WILL HE AVOID THE RISK AND PAIN OF BEING HUMAN,
OR WILL HE EMBRACE HIS MISSION AS ONE TO BE BROKEN
AND Poured OUT?

SATAN DARES JESUS TO SAVE THE WORLD BY BOWING
DOWN BEFORE HIM, EMBRACING THE EVIL ONE'S WAY.

JESUS MUST CHOOSE. WILL HE BE A SLAVE OF SATAN,
OR THE SON OF GOD?

WILL HE RULE THE WORLD THROUGH SATAN'S WAY
OF LIES AND SEDUCTION, THREATS AND VIOLENCE?

OR WILL HE SET FREE HUMANITY THROUGH
OBEDIENCE TO THE FATHER'S WAY, WITH VULNERABLE,
SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE?

ALL THOSE SAME POTENTIALS RESIDE IN US.

THE FATHER HAS CREATED US IN LOVE AND
BREATHED INTO EACH OF US HIS UNIQUE DREAM FOR US.
AND, IN GENUINE REVERENCE FOR EACH OF US BELOVED
CHILDREN, GOD REQUIRES US TO CHOOSE.

LENT INVITES US TO PONDER THE DREAMS OF GOD
WRITTEN INTO OUR HEARTS AND SOULS AS WELL AS OUR
BONES AND BLOOD, DESTINED TO BEAR A HARVEST OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR GOD'S REIGN.

AND LENT CHALLENGES US TO REMEMBER AGAIN
ALL THE TEMPTATIONS THAT THWART AND DISFIGURE AND
KILL THOSE DIVINE DESIRES IN US.

LIKE JESUS, WE HAVE TO CHOOSE. WILL WE SEEK TO
BE MANIPULATORS AND MAGICIANS, CHASING THE
ILLUSIONS OF POWER AND AUTONOMY?

OR WILL WE BE MEN AND WOMEN, HUMAN BEINGS,
EMBRACING OUR VOCATION AS CREATURES, CONFIDENT
THAT THE GOD WHO CREATED US DESIRES ONLY WHAT IS
BEST FOR US?

LIKE JESUS, WE HAVE TO CHOOSE. WILL WE TAKE FOR GRANTED GOD'S LOVE, AND BUILD OUR SELF-WORTH ON THE APPLAUSE AND ADULATION OF OTHERS?

OR WILL WE EMBRACE THE TRUTH OF HOW BELOVED WE ALREADY ARE, AND ALLOW THAT LOVE TO FREE US FOR HUMBLE SERVICE UNDER THE BANNER OF CHRIST'S CROSS?

LIKE JESUS, WE HAVE TO CHOOSE.

WILL WE BOW DOWN BEFORE THE IDOLS OF THE WORLD, THE DRIVE FOR POSSESSIONS AND PRESTIGE AND POWER, THE DESIRE TO DEVOUR EVERY PLEASURE AND SHUN ANY PAIN, AND SO ENSLAVE OURSELVES TO OUR OWN EGOS, APPETITES AND ADDICTIONS?

OR WILL WE STAND UP AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD, AND GUARD THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF EACH PERSON, INCLUDING OUR OWN?

LIKE JESUS WE MUST CHOOSE.

OUR DEEPEST DESIRE IS TO CHOOSE LIKE JESUS DID. ON HIS CHOICES, LIKE THOSE OF SO MANY BEFORE HIM—ADAM AND EVE, ABRAHAM AND SARAH, MOSES AND MIRIAM, ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, ELIZABETH, MARY---ON THOSE HUMAN CHOICES THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD HAS DEPENDED.

OUR SANCTUARY WILL BE RATHER BARREN DURING LENT, BUT COME EASTER, IT WILL BE BANKED WITH GORGEOUS BLOSSOMS.

IN THE SAME WAY, LET LENT PLANT IN YOU GOD'S WORD AND GOD'S WISDOM, SEEDS OF ALL THE POTENTIAL IN YOU, AND GOD'S DEEP DESIRES FOR YOU.

AND AS WE CHOOSE GOD'S WAY AND GOD'S WONDERMENT, AT EASTER,

WITH GRATITUDE AND JOY,

WE WILL BE READIED TO BEAR FRUIT FOR GOD'S REIGN.

FOR WE WILL LIVE ON EVERY WORD THAT COMES FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD.

AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD SAID, AMEN.