

21 February 2021 (Lent 1)

A liturgy for use at home

Notes:

A liturgy for use at home. Please adapt it as you see fit. Words in italics are instructions.

*Words in **bold** are said by all.*

PREPARATION

Light a candle as you read these words:

*“those who want to save their life will lose it,
and those who lose their life for my sake, and
for the sake of the gospel, I will save it
(Mk 8:35).*

Call to Worship¹

You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
For he has not despised or disdained
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to [our] cry for help.

Prayer of Approach²

God of all hope,
we gather today so deeply aware
of the world's grief and pain—and our own.
Comfort us, we pray, with the sure knowledge
that our Lenten journey culminates in Easter
joy. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Most merciful God
whose Son, Jesus Christ, was tempted in every
way, yet was without sin,
we confess before you our own sinfulness;

we have hungered after that which does not
satisfy;
we have compromised with evil;
we have doubted your power to protect us.
Forgive our lack of faith; have mercy on our
weakness.
Restore in us such trust and love that we may
walk in your ways and delight in doing
your will. Amen.

silence

Hear then the word of grace,
In Christ's name our sins are forgiven!

The Peace is shared

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Scripture

Mark 8:21-33

Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted
forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted
as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to
discipline ourselves in obedience to your
Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may
we know your power to save; through Jesus
Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Sermon

- *A written reflection is appended to these notes. The Sunday Sermon is also online³.*

THE RESPONSE

- Lent Disciplines to consider:
 - join the “online” small group.

¹ Ps 22:23–24

² Prayers of Adoration and confession from “The Worship Sourcebook”

³ <https://durbanvillemethodist.co.za/category/sermons/>

- fasting of some kind (food/social media etc.)
- In place of, or in addition, to fasting some find it helpful to add a practise e.g. keeping a gratitude journal, being intentional about sharing your faith and hope in Christ, volunteering to serve etc.
- Share with us the creative practises you are planning for Lent.

silence

Lord Jesus Christ,
in this Lenten season,
we hear your call to repentance.
We pray for a generous outpouring of your
Holy Spirit
to help us resist evil in all its forms
in our individual lives and institutions.
Help us turn toward you,
eager to receive the fullness of all you
promise. Amen.

Prayers of Supplication and Intercession⁴

*These prayers may help as you hold before
God the needs of our nation and church. Pray
them as written or allow them to lead you
into your own prayers of intercession.*

God of grace and glory,
in this season of repentance and hope:
Help us to turn away from evil **and turn
toward you.**

We pray that your people everywhere
will receive the courage
to turn away from evil **and turn toward you.**
We pray for the leaders of the nations and all
people,
that they may turn away from evil **and turn
toward you.**

We pray for every ministry of our
community,
that as we minister in your name,
we may turn away from evil **and turn toward
you.**

We pray for each of us as we live among
neighbors, people whom you love:
help us to turn away from evil **and turn
toward you.**

We pray that even now as we worship you,
your Holy Spirit will be at work,
teaching us how to turn away from evil **and
turn toward you.**

Benediction

**And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ, and the Love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forever more.**

⁴ Prayers of Adoration and confession from "The Worship Sourcebook"

I need a hero

We love heroes

“*Teen hero surfer*” appeared on my newsfeed, naturally I “clicked” for the story. 13-year-old Lourens said “*I just had the instinct that if I did not go in that boy would have died.* I love hero stories; ordinary people putting themselves in harm’s way to save another soul. Like that policeman the other day, he cannot swim, but waded into a raging river to rescue an elderly woman – **wow!**”

Hero stories appeal to nearly everyone. That’s why Superhero movies excel at the box office. The top grossing movie of all time (Avengers Endgame) has a whole team of superheroes!

When I see a storyline that’s universally loved and celebrated, I think, “*God must have written the plot into our hearts; we are wired for it*”. We love heroes. We long, even, for a “superhero” – someone to save the world.

For fun, through Lent, I’ve chosen a popular song that speaks to our longing. Today I couldn’t resist the 80’s hit “*Holding out for a hero*” –

“Where have all the good men gone

And where are all the gods

Where’s the streetwise Hercules

To fight the rising odds.... I need a hero, I’m holding out for a hero ‘till the end of the night

I’m sure that’s a romantic longing. But, there is a hint no mortal could fulfill the singers yearning, “*Up where the mountains meet the heavens above, Out where the lightning splits the sea, I could swear there is someone somewhere watching me*” ... (c’mon, tell me the Spirit’s not speaking through that song...)

Peter’s “hero” Messiah

Peter reckoned the long-expected Messiah would fit that (superhero) bill. What he’d seen was promising: Jesus drew the crowds, had no fear of corrupt leaders, and had super healing powers. Peter readily confesses Jesus as the Messiah (Mk 8:29).

But then Jesus taught that the “*Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again*” (Mk 8:31). Peter took him aside and rebuked him: “*Jesus that’s not the hero plot – don’t you know the storyline? You beat up the bad guys, you don’t get humiliated on the cross by them!*”

Get behind me Satan

Jesus responds “*Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men* (Mk 8:33).

Ouch! I suppose Jesus responds so vehemently because the human spin of the hero plot is tempting – for us and probably also for Jesus.

I think our human desires have distorted the hero longing in our hearts. People crave privilege, possessions, power, victory over enemies – our superheroes must secure these things.

King David's the great biblical example. He slew Goliath when just a boy. Women sang about him "*Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands*" (1 Sa 29:5). He expanded the nation – they were great.

In the eyes of mortals, we are *blessed to **better** other nations*.
In the eyes of God, we are *blessed to **bless** other nations* (Gen. 12).

Jesus says "*get behind me Satan*" because evil holds Peter, and us, captive to the "*things of men*"; desires that "*wage war against the soul*" (1 Peter 2:11).

Jesus, Messiah, true hero

Jesus is in fact the hero Peter longs for. Peter just doesn't know it yet. There's an interesting passage in Mark 3 where, I think, Jesus describes his mission in "*hero language*".

Jesus had been accused of driving out demons because he is the prince of demons (:22). Jesus explains how daft that reasoning is, "*a house divided against itself cannot stand*" (:25). Then Jesus says "*no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house*" (:27).

Friends, that's Jesus' mission! He comes to bind up the strong man and plunders his house. And we, you and I, are the "*plunder*". As Jesus says elsewhere "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mk 10:45).

Jesus accomplishes this mission on the cross. The cross exhausts our bloodshed, our hatred, our greed. It exposes the outcome of a life driven by our wants. It reveals the futility of a life in competition with others.

And, in Christ's death, Jesus goes to battle with evil; he "*binds the strong man*" and so breaks the chains that hold us captive.

In the cross Jesus sets us free from the strong man's chains of shame and guilt.

In the cross Jesus set us free from desires that wage war on our souls.

I've not explained how Jesus's death achieves this, and anyway, ultimately it is a mystery reaching beyond intellect, deep into our hearts.

I don't explain the mystery but I do invite you into it: Some of you watching, listening, reading, need rescuing, you need a hero – let's be honest you need a superhero. Friends, look to the cross, it says that all, "***all** who call on the Lord will be saved*" (Rom 10:13). Jesus will save you! He'll help you find a way through whatever mess you are in. Yes, he will save your very soul.

When Jesus saves, and He **will** save, let me know. I love hero stories and the best kind star Jesus as the one true, saving, hero!

We know our “*Holding out for a hero*” prayer’s been answered when we can sing:

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

(Isaac Watts, best hymn ever)