
The Great Undoing



Lent Easter 2019
Scripture Reading Guide

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What is the Season of Lent?

“I have flunked Lent. I flunk it every year.”

Fleming Rutledge writes these words in one of her many fine [Holy Week sermons](#). But they’re my words, too, and perhaps yours also.

We flunk Lent. We always do.

But this is not the bad news it may at first appear to be.

When we set out every year to observe a holy Lent, we pray Psalm 51 together, asking for mercy and cleansing, for wisdom, for an erasing of the record that stands against us—a blotting out of our iniquities. We pray that God will “create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us.”

And then we often act as if we must accomplish these things ourselves. We embrace Lenten disciplines—a good thing—but we easily mistake them for what they are not: self-improvement programs meant to make us better (thinner, smarter, nicer) people. We come dangerously close to narcissism, shifting our gaze from Christ and our neighbor in need to ourselves and our trivial preoccupations.

But Psalm 51 reminds us what this season is all about: that we cannot do the work of transformation by our own power, we can only cry out from the depths: “Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.”

In their own way, each of the readings in Lent reminds us that the work of transformation is God’s and not ours.

In another of her Holy Week sermons Rutledge relates this story: “During the Persian Gulf War, one of the *New Yorker* writers was reminded of an incident described by George Orwell during the Spanish

Civil War. Orwell wrote from the front lines that he saw a man from the opposing, Fascist forces jump out of the trench and run along the parapet in full view, presumably carrying a message to an officer. He had nothing on but a pair of ill-fitting trousers, which he held up with one hand as he ran. Orwell wrote, ‘I refrained from shooting him . . . I had come here to shoot at “fascists,” but a man who is holding up his trousers isn’t a “fascist,” he is visibly a fellow-creature, similar to yourself and you don’t feel like shooting him.’”

“When God looks at us,” Rutledge goes on to say, “he does not see titles, bank accounts, club memberships, vacation homes, net worth. He sees frail, vulnerable creatures trying to cover up our spiritual nakedness. When Jesus came down from heaven to live among us, he lived among us at that level. The Son of God gave up all his divine prerogatives and came into the world to be *a fellow-creature with us in our deepest need*. We were God’s enemies, deserving of death; but he looked on us trying to hold up our trousers with one hand and declared that we were not enemies but friends.”

As we begin another season of Lent let us recognize that whatever we give up – whatever we are taking on – we are likely to fail, cheat, or become prideful and arrogant. But maybe that’s the point of Lent. Because it turns out that in not making the grade, we are now free to see our failure for what it is: the freedom to give up the illusion that we are in control; to make visible our vulnerability as pilgrims on the Lenten journey toward friendship with God; and to learn what it means to live and love oneself and neighbour intuitively, without striving, with empathy, compassion, and effortless joy, deep in the heart of God.

Reflecting on Scripture

1. Where is God in the story? How is God at work? What does this passage teach you about God?
2. Who are the people in the story? Who would you be in the story? What does this passage teach about being human? About yourself?
3. What stood out about this story? What verse or word? What do you see or picture? What is strange, difficult or uncomfortable about this reading?
4. What do you think this story meant to the people who first heard it? What do you think it means today?
5. How does this story move you toward Jesus? How does this story fit into the bigger story of God's salvation through Jesus?
6. After reading this scripture, what questions do you have? What parts don't you understand? What questions would you ask God? The People?
7. In reading this passage how might it shape your prayers? How might it shape your actions? What does it ask you to do or not to do?
8. What does this scripture teach you about loving God and loving your neighbours?

The Bible is Israel's story. It is the church's story. It is God's story. If we read it carefully, we will see that it is our story. When we read with ears and hearts open to hear, God speaks and the scriptures convey to us "wonderful words of life."

First Week of Lent

March 11-17

Monday	Isaiah 54:1-8
Tuesday	Philippians 3:17-4:1
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 1:3-17
Thursday	Genesis 15:1-18
Friday	Luke 13:31-35
Psalm of the Week:	Psalm 51

Questions for Reflection

In Luke 13:35 Jesus says, “And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” To what sort of “seeing” does Jesus refer?

Is Jesus calling for more than a verbal declaration that he is the Messiah?

How might I live so that I become a testimony that Jesus is truly the one who comes in the name of God?

Household Prayer: Morning

Dear God,

I do not know all of the challenges that face me this day,
but still I pray:

if I should be tempted by desire for earthly gain,
remind me of my citizenship in heaven.

If I should be distracted by hunger,
satisfy me with your Holy Spirit until I hunger no more.

Let me walk in the way of Christ

so that my life testifies in deed and word,

“Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Dear God,

great is your mercy to me,

even when I have not remembered you.

Where I have strayed from your path,

forgive my sins and show me the way to salvation.

Grant me rest this night

that I may rise refreshed in my commitment

to the way of my Lord, Jesus Christ,

in whose name I pray. Amen.

Second Week of Lent

March 18-24

Monday	Romans 4:1-12
Tuesday	Numbers 14:10-24
Wednesday	Isaiah 55:1-9
Thursday	1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Friday	Luke 13:1-9
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 63:1-8

Questions for Reflection

Luke 13:1-9 tells the story of a fruitless fig tree that the owner is ready to cut down. The gardener, however, asks for a little more time. The gardener wants to tend and cultivate the soil in the hope that figs may yet grow. The gardener is open to a different future for this tree, despite its present condition.

Think about your own life, or the life of someone you love, in relationship to this story:

What needs special tending?

What will cultivate the “soil” of daily life so that new growth, new possibilities, might emerge?

And what can I learn from this gardener about allowing for a different outcome, a new possibility?

Household Prayer: Morning

Gracious God,
this new day carries the potential for growth and new life.
Help me to attend to those things in me
that need care and attention.
Sow your word in me
that I may grow in faithfulness and understanding.
Shake me out of dull routines,
so that I may take part in the good news
you continue to tell urgently and passionately.
In Christ's name. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

As I lie down this night in the shadow of your wings,
God of my life,
I know that you will be with me
even as you have helped me through this day.
Whether I am weary from the day,
or whether the day has been a rich feast of blessings,
I give thanks for your power and glory,
which are present in every circumstance.
As I give myself over to rest and sleep,
I remember that your steadfast love is better than life.
So, I pray, surround me with your love tonight and always.
In the peace of Christ I pray. Amen.

Third Week of Lent

March 25-31

Monday	Romans 2:1-11
Tuesday	Romans 2:12-16
Wednesday	Joshua 5:9-12
Thursday	2 Corinthians 5:16-21
Friday	Luke 15:1-3, 11-32
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 32

Questions for Reflection

In what ways am I like the Prodigal Son? In what ways am I like the elder son?

Household Prayer: Morning

Loving God, in all I do this day,
use me as a sign of your reconciling love.
Let me not view anyone from a human point of view,
but let me see all whom I will encounter with the eyes of Christ,
through whom I pray. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Merciful God, if like the Prodigal Son
I have strayed from you this day,
call me back to your loving embrace.
If like the elder son,
I have harbored resentment for the grace you give to others,
reprove me.
Help me claim in thought and deed the inheritance of the saints
who share with Jesus compassion and forgiveness to all who lose
their way. Amen.

Fourth Week of Lent

April 1-7

Monday	Psalm 53
Tuesday	Leviticus 23:26-41
Wednesday	Isaiah 43:16-21
Thursday	Philippians 3:4-14
Friday	John 12:1-8
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 126

Questions for Reflection

John 12:1–8 draws our attention to three people: Mary, Judas, and Jesus. It is easy enough to identify Mary as “the good disciple” and Judas as “the bad disciple” not only in this story but also in the larger story of Jesus’ life and death. We can (and do) make this judgment: Mary is accepted and affirmed, while Judas is rejected.

But is this the judgment that the other person in the story would make? As one commentator puts it, “... if Jesus came to save the lost, surely there is no one in the gospel story who is more lost than the one who betrays Jesus.... If the Good Shepherd can and does go to any length to save a lost sheep, is Judas beyond the saving grasp of the Good Shepherd?” This is not a question with an easy answer.

As this story ushers you into Holy Week, consider how the cross, the grace of Christ, speaks to this story and to your own life story, which like most life stories may not be a simple “either/or” example of faithfulness, but a “both/and” mix of faithfulness and unfaithfulness.

Household Prayer: Morning

Merciful God, as I begin this day,
place in me a spirit of generosity
so that I may freely share love, joy, and encouragement
with those I encounter.
Keep me from quick judgments
so that I leave room for your grace in my life and in the lives of
others.
Make me your faithful disciple in my words and in my actions,
as well as in the thoughts of my heart; in Jesus' name. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

All through the day, Lord Jesus, you have been present.
As I settle into the routines of home and evening,
I long to be at home in my relationship with you.
Help me to put aside the cares of the day and the worries of
tomorrow
in order to fully enjoy the peace of your presence now.
I pray that your peace will also be with those I know
who have special need of your care tonight,
and I pray for those who lie down this night without the safety of
home or bed,
without enough food or resources.
Bring your light into the surrounding darkness
so that all of us may sleep in the security of your love. Amen.

Final Week of Lent

April 8-14

Monday	Luke 22:14-23:56
Tuesday	Psalm 31:9-16
Wednesday	Philippians 2:5-11
Thursday	Isaiah 50:4-9
Friday	Luke 19:28-40
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Questions for Reflection

The events of Holy Week make up the central story of our faith. Can we see the suffering of others in our world in the passion of Jesus? What are some ways that the daughters and sons of humanity are crucified today? How are we called to respond?

Household Prayer: Morning

God, as I enter into this new day,
I ask that you keep me mindful
of the profound nature of this Holy Week.
Help me to go beyond the joyful parade of the palms
and to follow Jesus into the suffering of this world,
mindful that he was obedient to you, even to the cross. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Thank you, God, for the gift of this day.
If I remembered today my betrayals of you,
remind me now of your steadfast love for me,
as I give this day into your hands and rest in peace. Amen.

Easter Reflection

Father forgive them...

With these words we come to the heart of the Christian faith.

On the cross Jesus was not defeated, was not a failed Messiah – but somehow was the true one – that through this awful act – God is revealed to us and the purpose of the universe is unveiled.

The Romans and the religious leaders had a purpose in putting Jesus on the cross. It was to say – Here he is, this Messiah: this is what happens to failed Messiahs! This is what happens when you oppose us. When you try to change the status quo.

The men between Jesus weren't thieves, they were revolutionaries, they were terrorists depending on your perspective.

There were many of them in Jesus day – they were so eager to see God triumph in the world that they were ready to help his cause on its way through acts of violence, murder and terrorism.

These men between Jesus were dangerous and violent, these men deserved this.

Putting Jesus between these men was to say that he too was a threat to the status quo. A threat that would not be tolerated.

For the religious leaders putting Jesus on the cross said that he was just another trouble maker, deceiving the people, a pretender, a liar, and now a failure.

The leaders wanted Jesus to be someone to be ashamed of, despised, rejected, unclean.

So, they hung him naked on a cross on the outskirts of the city.

The story of Jesus comes full circle to the beginning we tell at Christmas – *no welcome for Jesus, dying just as he lived – on the outskirts at the margins.*

This should be the end of the story.

There is an old promise from the prophet Isaiah, about the one whom God would make king.

The one who was promised to come and save.

It was a promise that this the saviour king would be a servant.

That he would be someone who would suffer, familiar with pain.

Someone who would be despised and rejected.

Someone who we would turn our faces from.

This saviour wouldn't be strong – he would be oppressed, broken, crushed and cut off.

Someone who would bear the sins of many and be numbered with the transgressors and victims.

Someone who would pour his life out for others even to the point of death.

That this is how God would save us.

Now, look and see where Jesus is – where he is to be found.

Jesus, innocent of any wrong doing is found right in the middle of two sinners, two guilty and condemned men on a cross of his own.

Jesus is found right at the place of suffering, sorrow, pain, loneliness, betrayal, abandonment and death.

This is what God is like. This is where God is to be found.

If you have faced any of these moments of pain and brokenness, and wondered - Where is God? The answer is here – on the cross. God is with us through it all – in joy and laughter in and in pain and sorrow. In the middle of our mess. God is beside us right to the very end.

But what kind of God is this? How does this save us?

Is this the saviour we want? Is this the God we want?

Don't we want someone who is powerful? Aren't we saved by strength and power?

Aren't our heroes' athletes, celebrities, super-heroes?

We want power too – but all of us struggle with a sense of powerlessness in our lives:

We can't escape ineffective governments.

We can't stop war and crime.

We can't eliminate hunger, poverty or disease.

We still have relationships that are torn by brokenness that we can't heal.

And We all feel helpless and vulnerable sometimes.

But the cross of Jesus turns our world and our understanding of God upside down.

God isn't far away.

God doesn't sit in the sky waiting to mete out power to whomever says the right prayer or offers the right sacrifice.

Instead, on Good Friday we see a God who is so humble, so loving, so full of grace that – this God is willing to allow himself to be pushed out of the world and onto a cross to die for us.

A god who is one with the powerless, one with the hopeless, one with the broken.

A god who says

Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

And in so doing, redeems all of us – both victims, and oppressors, clean and unclean, sinner and saint.

God working at the margins, in weakness, in failure.

God taking endings and making them into beginnings.

God raising the dead to life.

Imagine yourself there standing there on that first Good Friday:

It has grown strangely dark now, in the middle of the afternoon, and in the darkness, even from this distance, we can hear Jesus:

Father for give them – For they don't know what they are doing.
Forgive them? Forgive us?

We remember that last night in the garden when Jesus asked if there could be any other way. And now it seems clear.

There could be no other way to show us what God is truly like.
God is revealed at last in this crucified man – giving himself to the very last breath, giving and forgiving.

And there could be no other way to show us what we human beings are truly like.

On the cross we see humanity at its worst – but in Jesus we see how things will be.

Standing before the cross we now know that everything will change – nothing can be the same.

Easter Holy Week

April 15 - 21

Monday	John 12:1-11
Tuesday	John 12:20-36
Wednesday	John 13:21-32
Maundy Thursday	John 13:1-17, 31-35
Good Friday	John 18:1-19:42
Holy Saturday	1 Peter 4:1-8
Easter Sunday	John 20:1-18
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 70, Psalm 22

Maundy Thursday Question for Reflection

How has following Jesus redefined the meaning of “glory” and “majesty” in your life?

Good Friday Question for Reflection

According to John, Jesus’ last words on the cross are, “It is finished.” The last words of Psalm 22 are “[God] has done it.” What is finished? What has God done? Why do we call this day “Good Friday”? Where is the good news in the story of the cross?

Easter Sunday Question for Reflection

What difference does it make to believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? How does your faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ change the way you think about sin and death? How does it change the way you live?

Household Prayer: Morning

Hold us fast, God our Savior,
as the curtain of night is torn,
and this dark day approaches.
Hold us fast, God our Savior,
as our faith and hope are tested
and we await the rising sun. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Holy God,
enthroned on the praises of your people,
we cry to you by day
and call on you by night.
Do not be far from us,
for trouble is near
and there is no one else to help. Amen.

Easter Sunday Prayer

God of endless life,
in the light of this new day
we see the dawning of your new creation.
Give us wonder and delight
to enjoy this day that you have made;
stay with us and help us to know that you are with us –
through the promise of your Word,
in the sharing of a meal,
and by the power of your Spirit
that burns within our hearts;
through Jesus Christ, our living Lord. Amen.

First Week of Easter

April 22 - 28

Monday	Acts 10:34-43
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 15:19-26
Wednesday	Acts 5:27-32
Thursday	Revelation 1:4-8
Friday	John 20:19-31
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 150

Question for Reflection

Thomas doubted the resurrection until he saw the nail holes and put his finger in the wound of the risen Christ's hands and side. We, too, have been wounded in this life, and our society often teaches us to hide our wounds and vulnerabilities. What might happen if, like Christ, we invited those shut down by life to explore our wounds?

Household Prayer: Morning

Gracious God,
you are the God
who is and was and is to be.
Thank you that Christ has freed us
to be a kingdom of priests
serving you and your world.
Give me a deeper sense, as I move through this day, of what it
means to say that you are my “Alpha and Omega,” my A to Z.
Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Jesus, tonight I remember
that your gospel gives me the power to forgive any and all,
through the gift of your Holy Spirit,
and that includes forgiving myself.
Breathe your peace into me
so that even if I pierced you today,
I can still see you coming to embrace me
with your freedom and love this night. Amen

Second Week of Easter

April 29 – May 5

Monday	Romans 6:3-11
Tuesday	Luke 24:1-12
Wednesday	Luke 24:13-49
Thursday	Revelation 5:11-14
Friday	John 21:1-19
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 30

Questions for Reflection

Jesus chose Peter, who had denied him in his hour of need, to tend his sheep and build his church. He chose Paul, who had persecuted Jesus' followers, to proclaim the good news of the gospel. Can anything separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ? What has Jesus chosen and called you to do?

Household Prayer: Morning

Lord Jesus Christ,
as you met your disciples
just after daybreak on the beach,
meet us at the dawning of this new day.
As you filled their nets with fish,
fill our lives with love and grace,
more than we can ask or imagine.
In your holy name we pray. Amen

Household Prayer: Evening

Gracious God, we praise you
for the blessing of this day
and the promise of tomorrow.
Be our helper as the night falls
and our joy when the morning comes;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Third Week of Easter

May 6 - 12

Monday	Acts 9:36-43
Tuesday	Luke 14:12-14
Wednesday	Luke 12:4-12
Thursday	Revelation 7:9-17
Friday	John 10:22-30
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 23

Question for Reflection

Psalm 23 affirms that God supplies our every need. How do our lives change when we trust this great promise of God?

Household Prayer: Morning

Holy God,
you have called a people to be your family
out of every tribe, language, and nation,
to love and serve you daily
in a world of beauty, complexity, and diversity.
Help us to honor and respect the dignity of difference
as we seek to be one with you and each other
this day and always. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

O Shepherd of all,
you have brought us to the close of another day;
for this gift and the blessings we now name,
we give you thanks....
All that we have and all that we are come from you;
and so, trusting in the goodness of your divine care,
let us lie down this night in peace,
that tomorrow we may rise to greet you in resurrection joy. Amen.

Fourth Week of Easter

May 13-19

Monday	Acts 11:1-18
Tuesday	Luke 5:1-11
Wednesday	Luke 12:29-32
Thursday	Revelation 21:1-6
Friday	John 13:31-35
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 148

Question for Reflection

In Acts 11:1–18, Peter, led by the Spirit, discloses God’s new directions to heal creation, and the church reconfigures its social boundaries. The Gentiles, who were excluded from the church in Jerusalem because their eating habits were judged to be vile and unclean, are now included by the reconciling work of the Spirit. Where is God’s Spirit opening us to new directions in mission this day?

Household Prayer: Morning

Delivering God,
each day we awaken to your goodness
and our hearts cry out in praise
as you set us to tasks for the life of the world.
Do not let us hinder your love,
but strengthen our will,
as we offer thanks in every simple gesture of this day. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Faithful God,
the nightly dance of earth, moon, and stars
speaks of your gift:
love given, love received.
We give thanks this night
for the love you have shown to us this day.
Let us rest in your peace and awaken in joy. Amen.

Fifth Week of Easter

May 20-26

Monday	Acts 16:9-15
Tuesday	Ezekiel 37:1-15
Wednesday	Ezekiel 37:15-28
Thursday	Revelation 21:10, 22 - 22:5
Friday	John 14:23-29
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 67

Questions for Reflection

When Lydia hears the gospel, she becomes the first Christian in Europe. Led by the Spirit, Lydia's faith is decisive, and her witness is immediate. The word opens her heart in love, and she opens her house in hospitality in service of the gospel.

How might Lydia's witness excite your sense of ministry and mission this day? Where might you find someone searching for God's word?

Household Prayer: Morning

Holy Spirit,
enliven in us a faith and witness like Lydia's,
that through deepened prayer
we might rise to action in service of the gospel. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

God, it is night and the time for rest has come.
We have served you in love this day
and for this we give you thanks.
Do not leave us comfortless,
but send your Spirit to abide with us as we trust in you this night.
Amen.

Sixth Week of Easter

May 27 – June 2

Monday	Acts 1:1-11
Tuesday	Luke 10:25-28
Wednesday	Luke 19:1-10
Thursday	Ephesians 1:15-23
Friday	Luke 24:44-53
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 93

Question for Reflection

How is your faith strengthened by knowing that we do not look for Jesus in only one place but find the Risen One everywhere, because he has ascended to the throne of God?

Household Prayer: Morning

Gracious God,
we thank you for bringing us through the night
and for making this new day.
You send us out rested and uplifted by your presence.
Wherever we go,
whatever our work today,
whomever we meet,
help us to greet our tasks and our leisure with joy.
We give you thanks, through Jesus, our Lord. Amen

Household Prayer: Evening

Wondrous Lord,
we marvel that this day has ended,
filled with marks of your love even in moments of strife.
Now give us rest.
Comfort those who have no bed this night,
and keep them safe.
We bow our heads in gratitude
for food, work, friends, family, challenges, and accomplishments.
We pray this in the name of the One
who watches over us day and night. Amen.

Baptism: From Death to Life

Some say that we should live like we're dying, like each day was our last. That this is the secret to happiness. But that won't do for us. We've *already* died.

No event in our lives as Christians should be of more lasting significance than our baptisms. I remember mine well.

I was robed in white. There were steps going down, down into the grave. It was wet, the water in the tomb was cold as it covered my body. The pastor put a hand over my mouth, and backward I fell into the dark waters, buried beneath Noah's flood, passing through the Red Sea, crossing the Jordan river, all the way down into a tomb outside Jerusalem where a crucified man lay waiting for me.

He took my hand and pulled me up.

The surface of the grave exploded. Water splashing around me. God above was splitting the veil between heaven and earth to say, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased."

Water dripped over me, making the unwashed, the unlovely, the unrighteous, the ungodly, *clean* - covering me in the love of God.

Every baptism is a watery funeral, where we die to sin and rise in Christ.

We stand on the Easter side of Good Friday, wearing God's Son, feeling the beat of his blood pumping in our hearts, the breath of his Spirit in our lungs. We are truly alive for the first time.

We are past death. We are in Christ. We do not live like we're dying.

We live as those who have already died and been made alive.

We live with joy.

We witness to hope.

We serve without fear.

We are sent to love.

Pentecost

June 3- June 9

Monday	Genesis 11:1-9
Tuesday	Acts 2:1-21
Wednesday	Joel 2:18-29
Thursday	Romans 8:14-17
Friday	John 14:8-17, 25-27
Psalm of the Week	Psalm 104:24-34

Questions for Reflection

What chains bind you or the people of your community at this time in your life? Where each day do you notice the freedom of Christ working to break the chains apart?

What gift of yours, of your family, and of your community has the Holy Spirit especially nurtured in recent times? How might that gift be expressed and used in a new way in the coming year?

Household Prayer: Morning

Gracious God,
we thank you for the peace of good sleep
and for keeping us safe throughout the night.
Let this new day be a time of praise and joy
as we go out to meet you in our sisters and brothers.
We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

Merciful Lord, as night comes to this house,
we thank you for the challenges and accomplishments of this day.
Give our hearts and minds the comfort now to rest in your care,
trusting that whatever tomorrow brings,
your hand will be ready to catch us if we fall. Amen.

