



**Lent to Easter liturgies: Year C
by Ann Siddall, Stillpoint Spirituality Centre**

(Cover photo by Heather Hargrave)

**These prayers and liturgies may be freely used in or re-printed for public worship, with
acknowledgment of the source.**

LENT-EASTER LITURGIES 2010: YEAR C

Ash Wednesday

(Liturgical colour: Purple)

Prayer of confession (based on Psalm 51)

On this first day of Lent
we pause, look within
and examine our consciousness.

**Have mercy on us, O God,
according to your steadfast love.**

Where we have neglected prayer,
been apathetic in worship,
found reasons to avoid generosity,
or lacked compassion:

**Have mercy on us, O God,
according to your steadfast love.**

Where we have colluded
in the oppression of those
who become invisible in their suffering,
and ignored on the streets:

Have mercy etc.

Where anxiety has eroded
the gift of Your peace, and where
we have cared too much
about what others think:

Have mercy etc

Words of assurance

As Lent begins, know that God understands
how we struggle to stay open and compassionate.
The invitation is not to focus on our inadequacies,
but on God's gift of grace and love
which transforms our hearts and minds.
That gift is given to us again, here and now.
Be encouraged.
AMEN.

May the peace of God be with you
and also with you.

Sending out

In the footsteps of centuries of pilgrims,
go now to embark on your Lenten journey.
Consider how you may simplify your days,
so that you may travel lightly.

Be alert to all that could side-track you:
notice that which beckons alluringly,
or with apparently greater urgency,
than the pilgrim journey Christ invites.

Do not try to cover
more than one good day's journey at a time.
Know when to stop for food and sleep,
so that the journey will not be too great for you.

Walk humbly, knowing that the goal
is not recognition, achievement or reward,
but simply to have come to know Christ
and yourself more intimately.

Be on the lookout for other pilgrims,
caring for those who limp, or fall;
those who cannot see the way forward:
pilgrimage is richer in community.

Go now: place your hand
into the outstretched hand of Jesus Christ,
allow the words of the story to guide you,
and pray for purity of heart and mind.
AMEN.

Lent One

Words about wilderness

Christianity began in a culture
where "desert" and "wilderness" were familiar environments,
both respected and feared as the place
where angels and demons might be found.

In wild, desolate places God's people
have been shaped by their struggles,
and have found that rocks have yielded water,
and manna has appeared on the ground.

Beware of the comfort of our lives,
where we grow complacent and over-confident,
and where discernment is limited
to choosing which products to buy.

In this country of Australia,
may we not forget the metaphors
of wilderness and desert, so familiar
to indigenous people and early settlers.

Our journey may be into an inner desert:
a place where motivation and desire
is purified, and we find ourselves refined
and strengthened in spirit.

Jesus, whose formation included wilderness,
will be at our side to pray for us,
will wipe away our tears, and place bread
into the hands which have clutched at stones.

Prayer of petition (based on Romans 10)

Oh God, may the faith within us
get out, onto our lips,
into our feet and hands,
through our hearts.

May what we sing and pray
here in this place,
get past our inhibitions
and into our actions this week.

May the passion for your Gospel
burn within our hearts,
so that we cannot be silent
in the face of deception or injustice.

If old-fashioned ways of sharing faith
do not ring true to us, then let us
persist until we find ways to tell our story
that reveal Your presence in our lives.

Help us, God, please help us
to just get it out, not arrogantly,
but as our humble confession
of what we believe.
AMEN.

Lent two

Prayers of confession

(The following words may be preceded by the reading of Psalm 27 and the singing of the Taize chant “The Lord is my light.”)

Lent is a time for going into our rooms in secret and letting the searching love of God clarify our hearts and minds, and purify our words and actions. In a few minutes of quietness now you are invited to go to your personal inner room and to be present to the God who is present to you. Don't work too hard at praying, or examining your conscience. Simply let yourself be present, and let your God look at you. If you find distractions coming, then it may help you to imagine Jesus kneeling alongside you in that inner space, offering prayer for you.

SILENCE (about five minutes – but at the discretion of the worship leader. People need gentle introductions to silence!)

To bring people's attention back, a few bars of “The Lord is my light” may be played.

Words of assurance

In the presence of the living God, you have been seen and known. Whether you felt it or not, you have been looked upon with love. A gentle light has been shone within you, and the great physician of souls has attended to you. May you find strength and encouragement from this. Amen.

Prose

And God called Abraham ...

What a promise! What a threat!
A land of his own: children to carry on the family line:
a long life: a covenant with God:
and, even though there would be some dark shadows,
a liberating God steadfastly upholding him.

But first, Abraham had to step outside,
outside of his sad story, outside of his fears,
outside of his apprehension that, despite his efforts,
God was deaf to his most heart-felt longings.

And once outside Abraham looked up,
and saw the whole universe spread out before him:
the sky ablaze with stars, the astounding creativity of God
inviting him to enlarge his imagination.

May we, children of Abraham, children of God,
be no less willing to step outside the confines
of the way we have seen our lives and our world,
and to turn our eyes to the work of the Creator.

May we, children of Abraham, children of God,
telling the stories of old and new covenants,
take whatever step God is inviting of us
to release our fears and enlarge our imaginations.
Amen.

Lent three

Call to worship

Only the hungry search for bread.
Only the thirsty look for water.
This is a place for those who are hungry and thirsty in spirit.

Only those who ache for meaning will pursue it.
Only those who yearn for a deeper life will seek it.
This is a place for those who ache and yearn for something more.

So let us come here today with our hunger and thirst,
our unsatisfied longings, our heart-felt yearnings,
and let the God of life satisfy our souls.

Lent four

Prayer after a sermon on the Prodigal Son

Father, it was said of the Prodigal Son that he “came to himself.”
Help us to wake up to ourselves, and to You.
Set us free from the illusion of trying to be perfect
so that we might be more fully human.
Help us not to chase after an imaginary life,
and to find satisfaction in our real lives.
And turn us away from our self-rejection
so that we might see that Your arms open in welcome.
AMEN.

Prayers of intercession (2 Cor 5: 16-21)

Reconciling Christ, bless our efforts to bring about reconciliation.
Give us the strength to persevere without counting the hurts,
and to find within ourselves the capacity to keep on loving.

**Give us the grace to be able to stand in the middle of situations,
and to be a conduit for the deep listening
which can lead to healing and forgiveness.**

Help us to conduct ourselves with dignity,
giving and expecting respect, moving from prayer to action,
and from action back again into prayer.

**Grant that we may be so grounded in your love,
that our security is not threatened if we change our minds,
or begin to see a better way to act.**

Bless those who are called to reconcile on a large-scale –
politicians, world leaders, leaders of business,
and those who stand in the midst of bitter conflict.

**Reconciling Christ, bless us and bless all who engage
in the sacred work of envisioning new wholeness,
and bringing people and nations together. AMEN.**

Lent five

Prayer based on John 12

Mary moved to the table,
holding the precious ointment,
her eyes meeting and holding
the gaze of the One preparing to die.

Mary fell to her knees
and broke open her treasure,
massaging the fragrant oil into his feet,
and wiping them with her hair.

Mary kept her eyes on his,
as a collective sigh arose,
followed by a bitter criticism,
an attempt to disqualify her action.

Mary's tense shoulders relaxed
at his words "Leave her alone":
Defended by Jesus
she could take on the whole world.

Jesus, friend and defender,
may we who remember her story,
be emboldened to live
with sensuality, courage and passion. AMEN.

Lent six: Palm or Passion Sunday

Call to worship

The story of Palm Sunday tells of how
people removed their cloaks and spread them out
in front of Jesus as he entered Jerusalem.

The cloak we wear every day to face the world
is both the persona we wish to present,
and our defence against the elements.

As we come to worship may we be willing
to lay down our defences and disguises,
at the feet of the One who sees us we really are.

And then, set free for worship,
may we offer our praises
with open hearts and lives. AMEN.

A psalm of celebration (Loosely inspired by Psalm 118)

Though we have known hardship and pain,
though life has not always turned out as we had hoped,
we will stand here and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

Though life becomes more complex,
the deepest questions remain unanswered,
and the mystery of faith deepens, we will say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

And though the pain of the world
often seems more than we can bear or address,
we will stand firm in our faith and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

Taking and giving the cup

(may be read before Holy Communion or as the invitation for people to come forward)

This was just a cup filled with wine (gestures towards the cup)
this was just ordinary bread, baked for guests (gestures towards the bread)
until Jesus took them

took and drank from the cup,
even though it was his cup of pain,
filled with the agony of the world;

took and broke the bread –
even though his body
was too young to be broken.

This (celebrant points to his/her self),
and these (gestures to the community)
would be ordinary lives

unless the bread, unless the wine,
is poured into them:
and the mystery of grace takes place.

Come, not because you fully understand,
but because you need to reach out
and receive the life that is offered to you.

Maundy Thursday

Invitation (based on 1 Cor 11)

This is for you,
but it may change you
from one who is anxiously concerned
about their own redemption

into one who knows
that Christ's body is the earth
and all who walk upon it,
are one in Him

into knowing that
we are not redeemed
by our being good
but by our being connected

into knowing that
daring to eat
at the table of Jesus Christ
has unimaginable consequences.

So come,
come to be made whole,
and to participate in the work
of making us one with Him and each other.

Invitation – foot washing

“Unless I wash you
you have no share with me.”

If only it were otherwise.
If only I could present my credentials,
show my record of service,
get some kind of unlimited pass.

In every area of my life
I am more used
to proving how adequate I am,
presenting a polished image,
gaining certain privileges.

But you, Lord,
you bring me down
to where you are kneeling,
and take hold
of the feet I prefer to hide.

We are here together,
near the ground,
and in this humble position
I am touched by you
and made clean.

Good Friday

(Liturgical colour: Grey)

Note: I had never noticed before that the liturgical colour is grey, so the opening words are based on this colour being prominent – on the communion table, or elsewhere. It may even be more dramatic to have someone bring in grey cloth and lay it over the table, or at the foot of the cross as these words are read, perhaps to a background of solemn music.

Opening words (John 18)

Today is one of the grey areas of the Christian year:
a day when the lights are dimmed
and the sky feels overcast even if it isn't:
a day when theologians and poets
feel as if a heavy veil is drawn over heart and mind.
An inexplicably sad day.

We resist the grey areas,
prefer to see everything in black and white,
look for cloudless, sunny skies,
try not to read between the lines;
throw in a bright colour or two
to try and enliven the scene.

In the grey light of early morning -
after a night in the ecclesiastical high court,
and denial by one of his own circle -
Jesus found himself at the gates
of the reluctant Pilate, who promptly
tried to hand him back to the Jews.

And though the sun rose that morning,
the whole world turned grey for One
who found himself without friend or helper,
faced with drinking a cup he'd prayed
would be turned away from him,
knowing that life was about to be drained out of him.

We are invited to accompany Jesus through this grey day:
to be witnesses to his suffering,
to keep silence before his cry of dereliction.
In our imaginations, let us trudge through Jerusalem,
until we come to the place of the Cross:
and then, let us not turn our faces away.

In this grey day lie all the sorrows and failings
of a humanity that strives for high success,
yet comes up against human limitations,
and falls to the ground in despair.
A humanity whose peace plans
give way to guns, and whose political promises
become papers in filing cabinets.

Here is a day marked by the brokenness of the world.
But it is not a day to wallow in misery,
or to indulge in morbid thoughts about the crucifixion.
It is simply a somber, dignified day
when we remember how it was for Jesus,
and find at the foot of the cross
a place to lay down ours and the world's sorrow.

On grey days it is hard to see clearly,
difficult to understand things that aren't clear.
Yet all we are asked to do today is to be present
to the sacred story as it is retold, and
to the inexplicable, mysterious, wondrous
transaction that was, and still is taking place.

Prayer of intercession (based on Isaiah 52)

Jesus, who knew what it was to be despised,
who was no stranger to suffering and infirmity,
who understood the pain of abandonment:
be with us in our living,
where the small dramas play out daily,
and where we feel great pity for ourselves.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy.

Jesus, whose friends hid their faces
and turned away when you needed them most:
whose bruises were a political statement,
and who was a victim of perverted justice:
be with us in our world, where millions
long for justice and dignity.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy.

Jesus, in this long, long day
before you were laid to rest,
grant to all those whose waiting
drifts on through long months and years,
the grace of knowing that you
are also present to our Good Friday stories.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy.

EASTER DAY

(Liturgical colour: white)

Call to worship

For those who first went out
into the early dawn, when the sky was grey,
taking spices to the tomb,
there was terror, and surprise.

For us, resisting the impulse to sleep in
as part of a long weekend,
and being over-familiar with the Easter story,
there is the risk of complacency.

So let us open ourselves
to the astounding possibility
that life can break out
at any moment!

Let us challenge the thought
that we have planned the future
so efficiently that
there will be no surprises!

Let us face the fact
that the walls of this church,
and the life of our institution
cannot entirely contain Jesus Christ!

Let us celebrate
the irrepressible power of God
breaking out with life
where we least expect it!

Another call to worship

We are not eye-witnesses to an event,
as were Mary and the disciples;
we have not journeyed
through a dangerous city
to seek answers or consolation;
we have not seen angels
gathering at the rim of this day,
or wept in the garden this morning
because we could not find Him.

But we are here to attest to a story
that has not lost its power
during twenty centuries
of change and conflict.

We are here because those before us
carried this story
as if it were precious gold;
cherished it as if it were
the key to a hidden wisdom.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
take your places here today
in celebration and in awe.
What you are about to hear again,
has the capacity to change the world.
Your very presence attests
to the rising up of life
from the tomb of despair,
and to the uncontrollable power of God.

It is Easter morning again:
and we will celebrate.

Prayers of intercession

O God, with faces touched by the light of a new day,
and hearts warmed by our prayers and praises,
we come before you to pray
for the needs of our world.

Into the light of Easter morning
we raise those who are struggling with illness,
with despair over their lives, or with
the breakdown of relationships.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring those places in our world
where war, violence, poverty and need
are the experiences of everyday life. (These places may be named)
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of Easter morning,
we bring the headline news of this weekend (this may be named):
we hold in our hearts the pain
of those suffering violence, bereavement or conflict.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

And into the light of Easter morning
we bring ourselves, the private struggles,
the heart's yearnings, the hidden dreams,
the unfulfilled potential.
May the light of Christ shine upon us.
May the light of Christ shine upon us. AMEN.

Words of commissioning and benediction

Go now as those who have met with Christ
in the morning of this day.

Go now as those whose hearts have burned within them,
as the Scriptures were explained.

Go now as those
who have been touched by resurrection.

And may the blessing of God
be upon you, body, mind and spirit,
as you leave this place,
AMEN.