



seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith

words for worship

FOR LENT-EASTER: YEAR A

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about this liturgy outline

- *Italicized lines are notes for worship leaders.*
- Unbolded lines are to be spoken by worship leaders and, when appropriate, printed in bulletins or projected on screens.
- **Bolded lines are to be spoken by the congregation and printed in bulletins or projected on screens.**

a benediction for the series

As you leave this place,
may God bless you with seeking.
Seek out the hungry.
Seek the weary.
Seek the good in every person you pass.
Seek out the hopeful.
Seek the faithful.
Seek God in each of us.
As you seek and as you wonder,
may you find what you are looking for.
In the name of our loving God,
who is always seeking us,
go now in peace. Amen.

seeking: *Is this the fast that I choose?*

call to worship

We gather together at the edge of a new season.

We stand together on the cusp of something new.

Will we wade into self-reflection?

Will we invite honesty to dance?

Will we listen for God's invitation?

Will we seek deeper faith?

What kind of fast do we choose? What kind of faith will we build?

We gather together at the edge of a new season.

Listen, God is speaking.

call to confession

Our scripture passage for today tells the story of people who are trying hard to be faithful. They ask God, "God, do you notice? Do you see all the good we're doing? Are you proud of us?"

It sounds a bit like children seeking parental attention. *Did we do a good job?*

In those moments we always want to hear God say, "Excellent job, good and faithful servant." But in today's scripture, God says to the people, "I want you to seek justice."

Friends, faith is a constant dance of us asking God, "Am I doing it right?" and, "How can I do better?"

In the prayer of confession we linger in this tension for a moment. We acknowledge that we are works in progress and we ask for God's help. God may challenge us, but fortunately, God will never abandon us. So let us turn to God in prayer, using the confession printed in your bulletin (or visible on your screen). Let us pray:

prayer of confession

Merciful God,

How many times in a day could we choose love?

How many times could we choose justice?

How many times could we speak kindly to ourselves?

How many times could we offer grace?

How many times, God? And how often do we miss it?

Forgive us for choosing the path you did not travel.

Forgive us for hitching our horse to the world's measure of goodness, instead of yours.

Return our hearts to you, and guide us continually, even in the parched places.

With gratitude we pray,

amen.

seeking: *Is this the fast that I choose? (continued)*

words of forgiveness

Family of faith, when a baby is learning to walk, the parents do not criticize the baby for falling. Instead, they celebrate every wobbly step. They applaud every hesitant stand. They whoop and holler when their child lands in their arms.

Surely the same must be true of God. Although we often lose our way and we often choose the wrong thing, I imagine God whoops and hollers with every step in God's direction.

So hear and believe the good news of the gospel: no matter how many times we fall, no matter how many times we choose the wrong path, God is waiting for us at the end with open arms. We are forgiven. We are invited. We belong.

Thanks be to God for a love like that. Amen.

prayer for illumination

God,

We want to hear your voice.

Shout loudly;
don't hold back.

Move in our spirits
the way you moved over the waters of creation.

We are beginning a new season today, God,
and we don't want to begin anything without you.

So speak to us today—
through silence,
through scripture,
through song.

Speak to us
as you spoke to the Israelites so many moons ago.

Speak to us like a gentle breeze
or a loud trumpet.

We don't care how,
we just long to hear your voice.

So don't hold back.

We are here.

We are listening.

Amen.

seeking: *Is this the fast that I choose? (continued)*

affirmation of faith

Inspired by the words of Isaiah 58.

**We believe in a God who chooses freedom,
who unties every rope and carries our burdens.**

**We believe in a God who ushers in the poor and the hungry,
who has a seat saved for all of us.**

**We believe in a God whose love is like the sun,
who says, "I'm here, I'm here!" every time we cry.**

**We believe in a God who walks before us in the parched places,
who rescues our bones,
who tends to us like a gardener.**

**And because we believe,
we strive to choose love.**

**Because we believe,
we strive to pursue justice.**

Because we believe...

Amen.

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *Who will you listen to?*

call to worship

Listen!

There is hope to be found here.

Listen!

God calls you by name here.

Listen!

There is love that abides here.

This world is full of chatter, so may we do our best to listen.

God is speaking.

Let us worship.

Amen.

seeking: *Who will you listen to?* (continued)

call to confession

Friends, if you are seeking grace, this moment is for you.

If you are seeking growth, this moment is for you.

If you are seeking honesty, this moment is for you.

In the prayer of confession, we admit to ourselves and to God that we do not have it all figured out. And in that vulnerability, we are surrounded by God's grace. So let us pray together, using the prayer of confession printed in your bulletin (or visible on your screen). Let us pray:

prayer of confession

Holy God,

Too often we treat your Word like a radio station—something we can tune in and out of when it's convenient. Our minds are full of ads, emails, news updates, and notifications. In the midst of this clutter, we tend to gravitate toward the voices that think like us—easily ignoring the voices being silenced, easily ignoring your voice. Forgive us for failing to listen. Forgive us for getting caught in distractions. Forgive us for forgetting what your voice sounds like. Drain the distractions from our minds and help us turn once again toward you. With earnest hearts we pray, amen.

words of forgiveness

Friends, even when we tune God out, even when we prioritize other voices, even when we do all the talking and fail to listen, we are *still* held by God.

Our sins are forgiven. Nothing could ever separate us from God's love. So with joy in our hearts, please repeat after me:

I am loved!

I am loved!

I am held in grace!

I am held in grace!

I belong to God.

I belong to God.

Amen.

seeking: *Who will you listen to? (continued)*

prayer for illumination

Below is a classic Prayer for Illumination. However, for this week's theme, it would also be appropriate to have a silent prayer where individuals are invited to listen. If you go this route, we encourage you to frame the moment of prayer by saying the following: "In the prayer for Illumination, we always ask for God to speak to us through scripture. However, when we do that, we end up doing all the talking. So today, in fitting with the theme of listening, we are simply going to carve out a few moments for silence. I invite you to take a deep breath, to close your eyes, and to listen for what God might be saying to you now. The moment of silence will conclude with a bell."

Holy God,
Listening is always easier said than done.
We shuffle into this space and try to quiet our minds,
but the list of distractions is long.
We need your help to listen.
So today we ask that you would
marinate us in your Word.
Dust the cobwebs from our ears.
Stir our souls awake.
Crack open our hearts to make room for you.
Scoop us up. Put us in your pocket.
Carry us with you wherever you go.
We want to hear you,
really hear you,
so speak to us now.
With hope we pray,
amen.

affirmation of faith

In a world full of noise,
we believe that God is speaking.
In a world full of chaos,
we believe that God is singing.
In a world full of temptation,
we believe that God is healing.
Church, who will you listen to?
We will listen to God—our Creator, Friend, and Guide.
Church, what will you listen for?
**We will listen for water in the desert,
for the wind of the Spirit,
for the laughter of children,
for the sound of open doors,
and for God's voice, who calls us beloved.**
Amen.