



seeking:

honest questions for deeper faith

CREATIVE RESOURCES FOR LENT-EASTER: YEAR A

resources included in the bundle

1. **devotional booklet** (A printable devotional booklet with: scripture, commentary, poetry, visual art, hymns, and written reflections).
2. **sermon planning guide** (A guide offering biblical commentary as well as theme connections and links to further reading for the lectionary scriptures from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
3. **words for worship** (Written liturgy inspired by the theme and the lectionary scriptures for Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
4. **children's curriculum** (Interactive and theme-based children's bulletins as well as story-based Sunday School lessons).
5. **15 new visuals w/ artist statements** (Illuminating the lectionary scriptures for Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
6. **branding bundle** (Logo files and graphics to help you share the Seeking theme in your print and online communications).
7. **poetry prayers** (10 poems inspired by our theme and weekly sub-themes).
8. **self-reflection tool for lent** (An introspective worksheet, crafted by our guest contributor, Danielle Shroyer, to help you reflect on your life and faith questions throughout the season of Lent).
9. **creative service for good friday** (A creative liturgy crafted by our guest contributor, Bruce Reyes-Chow).
10. **daily devotional cards** (Printable cards with daily prompts for building a daily rhythm of prayer).
11. **bonus resource: a meditative theme song video** (A worship video featuring our theme song, written and recorded by Spencer LaJoye. This will be released after our initial launch of the Lent resources, so stay tuned).

FREE SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

1. **hymn & music ideas**—traditional and contemporary music ideas that fit with our Seeking theme.
2. **engaging children in worship throughout lent**—a blog post with interactive ideas for children in worship.
3. **youth discussion guide**—a simple template for leading discussion groups with youth (particularly high school age) around the Seeking theme and scriptures.
4. **a content calendar for social media**—an add-on free to bundle patrons.

about the theme

The lectionary for Year A offers us many stories of Jesus encountering people who are seeking: Nicodemus comes to him in the veil of night, he approaches a Samaritan woman at a well, he heals a man born without sight. In these stories, each person is seeking a new beginning, a different life, a deeper faith. What unfolds is an exchange filled with questions and exploration. Often, an unveiling occurs—assumptions are disrupted, a new perspective is revealed, mystery grows.

And so, we've crafted a Lenten series founded on questions. Many of our weekly questions feel restorative ("Can these bones live?"). Some feel like a charge or challenge ("Who will you listen to?"). Some questions are hopeful and curious ("How do we begin again?"). Our questions won't necessarily lead to answers, but they can help us find clarity and a new perspective. Ultimately, we pray they lead to a new beginning, a restoration, a wider grace.

Like the characters in our Lenten scriptures, we are also seeking many things: clarity, connection, wonder, justice, balance. We are seeking our calling, the sacred, and how to live as a disciple. Throughout the turbulence of the past few years, many of us are asking big questions about our lives and our faith. If you are returning to church, you are probably returning with more questions and a critical lens. We hope this series will help us unpack some of those big questions in ways that are honest and faithful. Throughout this season, we hope you will continually ask yourself: what am I seeking? What is God seeking?

This Lent, we invite you to engage in the spiritual practice of seeking. We encourage you to stay curious, open, and nimble. We hope you will soften your assumptions and expand your perspectives. We pray that these questions will create a safe space to explore—to be drawn more deeply into the fullness of life, into the heart of God.



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FOCAL SCRIPTURES

Our theme and sub-themes are inspired by the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A), with particular emphasis on the following texts each week.



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

ASH WEDNESDAY

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

Isaiah 58:1-12

Is this the fast that I choose? As we begin our series, we must examine if our actions match what we profess. As we practice seeking this Lent, what kind of fast will you choose? How will you live your faith? How will you live the questions of your faith?



seeking:
*Who will you
listen to?*

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *Who will you listen to?*

Matthew 4:1-11 | Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

Seeking the fruit of the garden, Adam and Eve allow the snake's manipulative voice to become louder than God's voice. In the wilderness, Jesus defies the deception of the tempter by listening intuitively—to God, to his inner moral compass, to the teachings of his faith. And so, who will you listen to? What sources do you seek for news, information, and media? Whose voices—and what messages—take up too much space in your head? Within the onslaught of messaging we receive, we are invited to choose carefully.



seeking:
*How do we
begin again?*

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *How do we begin again?*

John 3:1-17 | Genesis 12:1-4a

Nicodemus comes to Jesus under the veil of night to ask him big faith questions. Jesus invites him to begin again, to learn a new way of knowing and living out his faith. In Genesis, God commands Abram and Sarai to leave everything—their home, their family, their land—to seek the land of Canaan and begin again. Like Nicodemus, what are the questions we ask in the dark? Like Abram and Sarai, how do we follow God's calling to begin again?



seeking:
*Will you give
me a drink?*

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *Will you give me a drink?*

John 4:5-42 | Exodus 17:1-7

In the heat of midday, Jesus seeks out a Samaritan woman drawing water from a well. His command to her is also a question and an invitation into a new way of life: "Will you give me a drink?" This question creates a dialogue between them in which Jesus sees the woman fully; she leaves the well transformed. In the wilderness, the Israelites essentially ask: "Will you give us a drink, God? Will you take care of us, even now?" This week, we might imagine ourselves at the well or in the wilderness. Are we willing to care for our neighbors, seeking to not just quench thirst, but to find living waters that sustain us all?



THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *Who sinned?*

John 9:1-7 | John 9:8-41

When Jesus and the disciples encounter a blind man along the way, the disciples immediately ask, "Teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). They ask a really bad question, filled with assumptions and harmful theology. Unfortunately, the crowd continues to interrogate the man and dissect the miracle of his healing. This week, let us pay attention to the questions we ask. What assumptions do we carry? What is our intent? When seeking clarity or understanding, what are better questions we can ask?



PALM / PASSION SUNDAY

seeking: *Where are you headed?*

Matthew 21:1-11

Imagine you are in Jerusalem when Jesus enters on a donkey. Within the chaos and commotion of that scene, where are you and which way will you go? Will you follow Jesus all the way to the cross? Jesus' willing surrender to his arrest should always catch us off-guard. As dismayed as the disciples, we ask, "Jesus, are you really headed this way, straight to your death?" Many of our weekly questions throughout the season so far have helped us prepare spiritually for Holy Week. Now we examine if our beliefs have changed our behaviors. Has your path changed? In the midst of opposing forces, which way will you go?



THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

seeking: *Can these bones live?*

John 11:1-45 | Ezekiel 37:1-14

In Ezekiel's vision, God asks the prophet, "Can these bones live?" Do we believe new life can come after death? Can we find hope when things are bleak? Can we really trust in God's resurrection? While we look to God to carry us through the valley, God looks to us to embody hope for others. As we prepare to enter Holy Week, we remember how Jesus began his final journey toward resurrection: by returning to Judea after the death of his dear friend, Lazarus. As we walk through the valley of dry bones that leads us to Calvary Hill, let us seek out the hope that will stir in us and sustain us.



MAUNDY THURSDAY

seeking: *Will you wash my feet?*

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

In his final night with his friends and followers, Jesus shows the fullness of his love by removing his robe, kneeling, and washing the disciples' feet. As he makes his way around the room, Jesus comes to Simon Peter who protests, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Like Peter, we may also question if God loves us and will care for us, even at the brink of death. In these final hours of accompanying Jesus to his grave, can we seek a posture of trust? Can we allow ourselves to be embraced and loved—by our neighbor and by God?

GOOD FRIDAY

seeking: *Why have you forsaken me?*

Matthew 27:27-50

Of all the questions in our series, this one remains the most unanswerable. Jesus' final lament gives voice to all those who have been forsaken—those who suffer injustice, those who are abandoned, those who are unjustly convicted. Instead of trying to answer this question with logic or theology, we are invited to live it, to sit with it. Sitting with this unsettling question unearths and unveils many more questions: What do we do in the face of unimaginable suffering? Can we sit in the silence of death and trust that God is there? Will we be in solidarity with those who suffer and grieve?

EASTER SUNDAY

seeking: *Who are you looking for?*

John 20:1-18

Jesus, mysteriously appearing to Mary as the gardener, asks her: "Why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" In the haze of grief, Mary can only see what is right before her—or in this case, what is not before her. It is only when Jesus calls her by name that the veil is lifted and she beholds the resurrected Christ. On this Easter morning, who—or what—are you looking for? Why have you come to the tomb? What kind of Jesus are you looking for? What veils need to be lifted so we can recognize God's resurrection wherever it occurs?



seeking:
*Why have you
forsaken me?*



seeking:
*Who are you
looking for?*

about the logo & branding

An eye feels like a recognizable and even predictable image for the general theme of *Seeking*, however, there is nothing all that simple or straightforward about this Lenten theme. As I studied the texts, I found there was repetition in visual imagery that held the texts together. As I sketched, the logo became layered with imagery that formed more shapes and meaning, sometimes obscuring and revealing more as I went. It was a balance of maintaining the legibility and clarity that is necessary in a logo, while connecting to a theme that is about being unable to find understanding or even tangibility. I wanted the logo at first glance to be somewhat obvious, but at closer inspection, I wanted it to expand, confuse, and surprise. The viewing of the logo itself is a process of seeking meaning.

— Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman, designer of the theme logo and branding



logo imagery key *what do you see?*



eye- The eye holds all of the logo's imagery and summarizes the theme of seeking, while referencing various narratives from the scriptural texts: Adam & Eve's eyes are opened, Jesus rubs mud on the blind man's eyes, Jesus asks Mary, "Who are you looking for?" The circles that create the pupil and iris can also represent: an aerial view of the well, the water basin at the footwashing, or the stone and tombs of Lazarus and Jesus.



veil- This curved line and the shape it creates repeats throughout the *Seeking* branding. The veil references the confusion and revelations that occur in a journey of seeking.



mud / garden soil- The drop of mud represents the dirt and garden imagery that is found throughout the scriptural texts: the Garden of Eden, the mud that is rubbed in the blind man's eyes, the garden of Gethsemane. It also references when Jesus is mistaken as a gardener at the empty tomb.



water- The drop of water references the many times water is mentioned in the texts. Jesus tells Nicodemus he must be born of water and spirit. Moses strikes a rock to find water. At the well, Jesus asks a Samaritan woman for a drink and offers her living water. Jesus meets the blind man at the pool of Siloam. Jesus washes the disciples' feet. The water drop can also reference a tear; Jesus weeps at the mouth of his friend Lazarus' tomb, and Mary weeps at the mouth of Jesus' tomb.



vessel- The shape of the vessel can be seen as a cup or a jar poured out. The vessel represents: the jar the woman leaves behind at the well after meeting Jesus, the jar of sour wine offered to Jesus while on the cross, and the communion cup present at our remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.



star / night- The star references a couple of the narratives that take place under the veil of night. Nicodemus finds and questions Jesus at night, and Mary comes to the tomb while it is still dark. In reference to the logo's overall eye composition, the star represents the glistening of recognition in one's eye.



leaf- The leaf represents the foliage present throughout the texts, and further supports the repetition of garden imagery. Adam & Eve create fig leaf coverings in the shadow of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and upon Jesus' humble entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds wave palm branches.

about our guest contributors

GUEST ARTISTS



Rev. T. Denise Anderson

is creating visual art that will be featured in our devotional and visual art collection. Denise is now an on-going contributor, having collaborated with us for past resource bundles.

Denise (she/her) is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the acting Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency's Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries. A graduate of Howard University School of Divinity, she is the former Co-Moderator of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (USA). A nationally-recognized writer and blogger, Denise's work has appeared in *The Christian Century*, *The Huffington Post*, *These Days*, and on her own blog, *SOULa Scriptura: To Be Young, Gifted, and Reformed*: soulascriptura.com. Denise writes, preaches, and engages on issues of social justice, diversity, and reconciliation. As a gifted visual artist, she creates art that explores themes of spirituality, history, religion, and race: tdandersonart.com.



Carmelle Beaugelin

is creating visual art that will be featured in our devotional and visual art collection.

Carmelle (she/her) is a Haitian-American visual artist, Human-Centered Design Consultant, and "holy cheerleader" based in Princeton, NJ. Her creative focus includes abstract impressionism/expressionism painting inspired by Afro-Latin Caribbean art styles and Christian spirituality. She is the Founder and Lead Curating Artist at BeauFolio Studio, an emerging arthouse at the intersection of sacred art, human-centered design, and restorative equity. Carmellebeaugelin.com



GUEST MUSICIAN

Spencer LaJoye

is writing and producing our Seeking theme song.

Spencer LaJoye (they/them) is an award-winning folk/pop singer-songwriter, violinist, and vocal loop artist in Boston, Massachusetts, who believes everyone is made of the good stuff. They make music to remember what it means to be human, to find connection in a time of disconnection, and to feel something in a world gone numb. Spencer's latest EP, *Remember The Oxygen*, was written before, during, and following their coming out as trans/gender nonbinary. Their newest single, "Plowshare Prayer," went viral among hurting and healing people around the world before the studio recording was released. It poses an answer to the question: what would a prayer sound like if used as a plowshare instead of a sword? What would a prayer sound like if it made space for actual people instead of trying to change them? spencerlajoye.com

about our guest contributors

GUEST WRITERS



Rev. Bruce Reyes-Chow

is writing commentary that will be featured in our devotional booklet and sermon planning guide. He is also crafting a creative liturgy for Good Friday.

Bruce (he/him) is an active speaker and writer on topics of faith, culture, race, and technology. He is the host of the podcast, "BRC & Friends," and the author of five books. His latest is, *In Defense of Kindness* (Chalice Press, 2021), and he is currently working on his next book, *Everything I Believe about God* (2023). Bruce has been an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) since 1995, has pastored five churches and has been active in local politics in the San Francisco Bay Area for nearly three decades. He is also a Senior Consultant and Coach with *Convergence* and is a Gallup-Certified CliftonStrengths Coach. Bruce has an active online presence and can be found on most social networks via @breyeschow with all current links here: linktr.ee/breyeschow. breyes-chow.com



Rev. Danielle Shroyer

is writing commentary that will be featured in our devotional booklet and sermon planning guide. She is also crafting a self-reflection tool for the season of Lent.

Danielle (she/her) is an author, speaker, spiritual director, and former pastor. A founding member in the emerging church movement, Danielle served as the pastor of one of the nation's first independent emerging communities of faith for nearly a decade. Her primary goal as a pastor was to help people going through a season of spiritual deconstruction find healthy, sustainable, and meaningful ways to reconstruct their faith. Danielle has a particular heart for the spiritual-but-not-religious, and has long advocated for fresh approaches to spiritual community. Danielle is the author of *Original Blessing: Putting Sin in its Rightful Place* (Fortress Press, 2016), *Where Jesus Prayed: Illuminations on the Lord's Prayer in the Holy Land* (Paraclete Press, 2016), and *The Boundary-Breaking God: An Unfolding Story of Hope and Promise* (Jossey-Bass, 2009). She holds a B.A. from Baylor University and an M.Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary. danielleshroyer.com

reflections on the theme

"Brainstorming for this Lent's theme was especially frustrating for me. I spent weeks trying to get a grip on words or phrases that encapsulated the energy of these profound questions from the texts. At first glance, some of the questions seem very simple, but once you peel back a layer, they turn into those kind of life-long existential questions. In some ways the questions are forward-thinking and in other ways they are retrospective. The questions are introspective and individual while at the same time outward-facing and collective. I found myself in a kind of confusing dance trying to figure out a perfect way to neatly package this sense of reaching out, poking holes, lamenting, feeling the edge of clarity, missing the point... etc. The word 'seeking' surfaced pretty early on in our planning—but seeking what? I wanted to know what we were searching for. However, it became clear that the object of the seeking wasn't the point; it was the journey of seeking that we were trying to grasp. This theme is about being raw and honest in our questioning, our doubts, our fears, our confusion, our discoveries—and in that process, unveiling a more authentic, rooted faith. It is in our seeking that we journey alongside the Man of Sorrows, and ultimately, find the sunrise."

— Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman,
*Founding Creative Partner,
Director of Branding*

"This Lent, we are invited to seek in the present continuous tense. This tense is active. It is also unending, never quite attained, an opportunity. We choose to be grounded in seeing and seeking in new ways. In this way, I strive toward a hopeful understanding of cyclical human behavior, now more than ever before. How can such ancient writings still be relevant? How have we not yet fixed the problems of the world? Why must we be forever attaining the new heaven and the new earth you speak of, God? The naivete of my youth has worn off, and so I must not give up. I find in God an illogical hope and seek to live into it. Hope ripples out, one by one. Hence, it is with a reverent mind that I turn patiently to the concept of seeking, of ever-seeking hope. I arrive here with the lens that I cannot change the world by changing others, but that I can change the world by changing myself afresh. I focus on what I can control. So, I relish in this opportunity to continue seeking a new layer in these familiar words from God, our God. God who is always moving, present and continuously, in ways far beyond the page—active, unending, never quite attained, an opportunity."

— Hannah Garrity, *Founding Creative Partner*

"So often faith is portrayed as something you have or you don't. You are strong in your faith, or you are knee-deep in doubt. It's one or the other. This black and white thinking fits with our society's obsession with choosing sides. However, it doesn't fit with my experience of faith. For me, faith has always been an experience of seeking—seeking God in the world, seeking the good, seeking a deeper truth. I seek my way through prayer. I seek my way into scripture. I am forever cobbling together memories, feelings, questions, and experiences, all in an effort to see God more clearly. When we studied the scriptures for this season of Lent, I saw that same hungry seeking in the text. Over and over, people ask questions. Jesus asks questions. The crowds ask questions. Everyone seems to be looking for something deeper, and it is that honest curiosity that allows them to run into the Divine. This Lent, I long for that same experience for all of us. So may we be seekers. May we ask questions. May we look for God under every rock and stone. And in the seeking, may we find."

—Rev. Sarah Speed, *Founding Creative Partner*

"When I hear the term 'seeking' used within a faith context, I automatically think of the famously-quoted adage, 'Seek and ye shall find' (Matthew 7:7). This verse is often used to perpetuate a transactional, fairytale faith: if you just try harder or pray harder, then what you want will be granted to you. I wish more than anything that life and faith would operate within a predictable, merit-based system of seeking and finding, asking and receiving. However, you and I both know this isn't reality. Instead, I hope to live a seeking faith, a faith that is ever-growing, adaptive, resilient, and filled with awe. We are now in the third year of a societal overhaul in which many of our disparities, vulnerabilities, and differences are more exposed. This chapter of life has most likely unearthed big, honest questions—about your purpose, your faith, your identity, your future. And so, this Lent, we invite you to bring those big questions to God. We invite you to engage in the spiritual practice of seeking, staying curious, porous, and malleable. Like Nicodemus, can you let go of what you used to know in order to begin again? Like the Samaritan woman at the well, will you let yourself be fully seen? Like Mary at the empty tomb, can you recognize God's resurrection when you encounter it?"

—Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, *Founder, Creative Director*

"Questions are a sign of growth, curiosity, and wonder. We expect that children as they grow will ask thousands of questions about the world around them, not because they are suspicious of it but because they are drawn to it. Being drawn toward a deeper faith, and toward God at its center, will naturally come with questions, big questions that dwarf our simplistic answers. Many of the college students I've pastored come from churches that rush to answer questions quickly and definitively because they are seen as a sign of doubt, which is seen as a sign of lacking faith. But questions are an invitation into deeper faith. They are an invitation for the Spirit to move within the wonder, in the space between the question and the answer. This Lent, let us seek good questions rather than easy answers."

—Rev. Anna Strickland, *Operations Support &
Content Creator*