

Lent is a time for intentional re-connection with God, “by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.” It might not feel like we have enough time to teach all that. Here are three teaching points to help you get started.

Lent is upon us, the forty days set aside to prepare to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. *The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer* tells us that Lent is a time for intentional re-connection with God, “by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.” Forty days doesn’t seem long enough to teach all of these Lenten practices, so here are three teaching points to help you get started.

Jesus’ 40 Days in the Wilderness

Scripture tells us that after his baptism, Jesus was “led by the Spirit” into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:1-2, NRSV). When we teach about Jesus’s time in the wilderness, we often focus on temptation, sin, and resistance. Jesus is an example for us—he was tempted but did not sin. However, in [Henri Nouwen offers a different lens](#) for this story, one that draws on the connection between Jesus’s baptism, the voice from heaven that said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased,” and his time in the wilderness. Nouwen writes,

“Jesus’s temptations in the desert, described in the Gospel of Luke, are temptations to move him away from [his] core identity. He was tempted to believe he was someone else: You are the one who can turn stone into bread. You are the one who can jump from the temple. You are the one who can make others bow to your power. Jesus said, ‘No, no, no. I am the Beloved of God.’ I think his whole life is a continual claiming of that identity in the midst of everything.”

What if we view Jesus’s time in the wilderness as a time when he was tempted to stray from his identity as the Beloved Son of God? What would this mean for our observance of Lent? Could we see the difficult wilderness times of our lives as times that holding onto our

identity as Beloved of God is most challenging? Could we take on a practice during Lent that reminds us of our Belovedness? Could we see Lent as an opportunity to remove the distractions and obstacles in our lives that prevent us from living into our core identity as Beloved of God?

Fasting and Self-Denial

The Christian practice of fasting is quite old. As Jacques Hadler describes in his article [“A Beginners Guide to Christian Fasting”](#) in emptying ourselves we create space for God. I recently heard The Reverend Timothy Cole preach about the Beatitudes in just this way during a Children’s Homily at Christ Church, Georgetown in DC. Rev. Cole had a large bowl of candy, a glass cup full of candy, and an empty glass cup. He spoke of the many types of emptiness we might have in life: empty pockets, empty plate, empty heart and how when we have any kind of emptiness there is room for God to be at work. He held up the full cup and tried to add a handful of candy to the top. Candy spilled all over the floor. What’s missing here, he said, is room for God. And how can we make room? He poured some of the candy from the full glass into the empty glass.

Perhaps we can think about fasting in this way, emptying ourselves just a little bit to create space for God and remind ourselves of our dependence on God.

Children and Faith Development

We all grow and develop at different stages: physically, emotionally and in our faith. Lent can be a hard time of year for children who are concrete thinkers. It can be a challenge to move so quickly from the Nativity to this time of solemnity and into Holy Week and Easter. This is a good time to focus on the actions we take as Christians: prayer, almsgiving, and repentance. Help your students of all ages to understand as the Apostle Paul did that, “the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:6). Our practices and worship help us find expression when we might not have the words. Help children and their families sink more deeply into our Christian practices with suggestions for at home prayers in a variety of different forms.

An excellent resource with practical applications for different ages and stages of faith development, see the [Episcopal Diocese of Alabama’s Christian Formation Scope & Sequence](#) document.

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