

Living in the Promised Land

A Preaching &
Worship Resource
For Lent - Year B

John van de Laar

Sacredise

Living in the Promised Land

A Lenten Journey

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The Lenten Journey

Introduction

The highlight of the Church Year is, without question, the journey from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday that we know as Holy Week. While, technically, it embraces parts of three seasons (Palm Sunday is still part of Lent, and Easter Sunday is really the beginning of Eastertide, which continues all the way through to Pentecost Sunday) Holy Week, which gives a profound opportunity to meditate at length on Jesus suffering, death and resurrection, is often viewed as a unit, and made the focus of our greatest and most creative liturgical energies. However, for this significant week to have the formative impact on worshippers that we hope for, requires effective spiritual preparation. This is the purpose of Lent.

Traditionally Lent, along with Advent, was one of the great seasons of preparation for candidates who were to be baptised on Christmas Day or Easter Sunday. Today, while baptism is no longer performed only on these two days, Lent remains a powerful journey of penitence, spiritual discipline (focussed around the three practices of fasting, prayer and giving of time, talents and treasures) and preparation for the Holy Week experience. As such, the Lenten season requires nearly as much creative energy as Holy Week, but over a more extended time. For busy pastors and liturgists, sustaining a creative, transforming and spiritually challenging journey can be very difficult. It is for this reason that Sacredise is proud to offer this resource - ***Living in the Promised Land*** - based on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for Year B.

Living in the Promised Land provides sermon-based commentaries on the Old Testament and Gospel passages for each week (including Ash Wednesday), theme-based liturgies for each week (including an 'Imposition of Ashes' rite for Ash Wednesday and a specially written Service of the Table which can be used on any week where the Eucharist is celebrated), hymn suggestions and small group guidelines. Any part of this resource may be freely photocopied or distributed within a single local church for congregational use.

Please note: No daily devotions are provided because they are available (for every day of the year) on the [Sacredise Daily Worship blog](#). Please check it out to receive the Daily Worship guides on the web, via RSS, or via email (the latter offers the whole week from Sunday to Saturday sent out on the Thursday prior, and includes an option to download the guides in PDF format).

My prayer is that you and your congregation will find ***Living in the Promised Land*** to be a resource that takes your Lenten journey deeper, and that enables it to be a time of true formation into Christ-likeness. God bless you on this significant journey!

Grace
John

PLEASE NOTE:

This sample is intended to give a feel for the full resource which is available from [Sacredise.com](#). The complete resource is delivered in a zip file including the full pdf version of the resource book and the fourteen full size graphics files.

Ash Wednesday

Eternity Now

Readings:

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

¹ Sound the alarm in Jerusalem! Raise the battle cry on My holy mountain! Let everyone tremble in fear because the day of the LORD is upon us.

² It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick clouds and deep blackness. Suddenly, like dawn spreading across the mountains, a great and mighty army appears. Nothing like it has been seen before or will ever be seen again.

¹² That is why the LORD says, "Turn to Me now, while there is time. Give Me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

¹³ Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead." Return to the LORD your God, for He is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. He is eager to relent and not punish.

¹⁴ Who knows? Perhaps He will give you a reprieve, sending you a blessing instead of this curse. Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and wine to the LORD your God as before.

¹⁵ Blow the ram's horn in Jerusalem! Announce a time of fasting; call the people together for a solemn meeting.

¹⁶ Gather all the people--the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the bridegroom from his quarters and the bride from her private room.

¹⁷ Let the priests, who minister in the LORD's presence, stand and weep between the entry room to the Temple and the altar. Let them pray, "Spare Your people, LORD! Don't let Your special possession become an object of mockery. Don't let them become a joke for unbelieving foreigners who say, 'Has the God of Israel left them?'"

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹ "Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.

² When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do--blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get.

³ But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

⁴ Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

⁵ "When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get.

⁶ But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

¹⁶ "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get.

¹⁷ But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face.

¹⁸ Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

¹⁹ "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal.

²⁰ Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal.

²¹ Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

Eternity Now

In Stephen Covey's book, *Everyday Greatness*, the story is told of Angela Brown who dreamt of being an opera soprano. At her father's instruction she trained as a secretary (in order to have something to fall back on), but then went on to study voice at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Indiana. It was here that her dream of singing opera was birthed, and it led her on to Indiana University after graduation, to study with the famous soprano Virginia Zeani.

Through her years of study she worked hard, competing three times in the Metropolitan Opera National Council auditions, but each time failing to make the final round. At thirty-three she had one last chance to compete before passing the age limit, and she took it, winning the competition. But, in spite of this victory, it took her three more years before she became an understudy. Finally, at age forty, she had her chance to sing the lead in *Aida* when the principle singer fell ill. She triumphed and, from that moment, her career has gone from strength to strength.

Angela Brown took decades to reach what she felt was both a dream and a calling. But, it also took commitment, perseverance and the refusal to settle for a quicker and easier alternative. Once, when she was wrestling with whether she would ever reach her goals, her teacher, Virginia Zeani said to her, "If you want to be the next Aretha Franklin, go, you need no more lessons. But if you want to be the best Verdian soprano this world has ever seen, you must work."¹

Settling for Less

I have become convinced that one of the greatest challenges of our time is that we have learned to settle for too little. We have lost the art of delaying gratification, and so we have learned to accept the failure of our grand dreams and callings, and settled for a life that is less, but that we can enjoy sooner and more easily. Our world has fallen prey to a disease of the now. We cannot expect our corporate or political leaders to make decisions which will be tough in the short term, but bring long term benefit, when they are measured after three months or one hundred days. We cannot expect to attain the very reachable goal of an end to extreme poverty when the wealthy cannot delay fulfilling their desires long enough to change the system that created it. We cannot hope to create the time and space for our planet to heal when our immediate needs take precedence over the rain forests and the changing climate.

Our instant world has left us with a deep insecurity that if we slow down, if we delay gratification, we will miss out and somehow fall out of step with our peers. Our loss of the perspective of eternity has left us with a deep cynicism of eternal values and practices, and so we have become addicted to quick fixes, even when experience shows us over and over that they don't work for any substantial length of time. Yet, in the depths of our souls, we live with

¹ Vetter, Joseph, K. *The Understudy*, featured in: Covey, Stephen, R. *Everyday Greatness*, (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 2006), 363-4

a growing uneasiness, an unspoken suspicion, an unacknowledged dream that our lives and our world - that we - can be more than what we experience. We long for wholeness, for fullness, for real, vibrant, meaningful life. In truth, we long to touch eternity.

In spite of the rapid rate of change, and the ease of accumulation that has grown out of the industrial, technological and information revolutions, this quest for the immediate is not a new disease. In the prophecy of Joel that is set for Ash Wednesday every year in the Revised Common Lectionary, it appears that the judgment that the prophet utters in the first section of the book has to do with just such a condition among the people of Israel. There is little that is known about Joel - we have no information beyond that which is provided in the book that bears his name. We are not even sure whether his prophecy occurred before or after the exile (although its place in the Canon of the Old Testament may suggest before). All we know is that Joel proclaimed a coming judgment on God's people for becoming so engrossed in their lives that they had fallen away from God.

The people who are addressed in Chapter One give a glimpse of what may have been the reason for the judgment. Drunkards and wine-drinkers, farmers and vine-growers (who, it seems, may have been seen as 'enablers' of the drunkenness and indulgence), priests and those who serve before the altar (who should have been, but clearly weren't, instructing and challenging the people to stay faithful to God's ways, and keep their lives aligned with God's Reign) are all instructed to weep and wail because their fields, their grapes and crops, anything that might make an offering, will be consumed by locusts. While the cause of the judgment remains in the realm of speculation, it seems that the people had grown comfortable and complacent, and had lost the divine perspective and their commitment to higher values. And so, the very wealth that was putting them to sleep, is to be taken away. The "now" had crowded out the eternal, and the result was that they would end up grieving the shallow and temporary values that they had lost.

But, then, in the reading assigned for this day, the prophecy turns to invitation and restoration. Joel's proclamation of judgment now gives way to words of mercy. The people are called to return to God. Unlike other prophets, Joel's call is very simple. There is no talk of required justice. All that the people need to do is return to worship - to lives that are oriented around God, and that embrace something more than the immediate world. They are to embrace again the gathering of the people in God's presence, and the practices that ensure that their lives remain focussed on and directed by God. The problem with the people of Joel's day was not that they wanted too much. It was that they settled for too little. God was calling them to long, once again, for eternity.

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses a similar issue. His basic premise is that the Reign of God is something completely different from the systems of the world - be they political, economic or religious. He challenges the hypocrites (*hupokrites* - literally, *play-actors*) who have become addicted to the immediate reward of applause and admiration, and have rejected the hidden, eternal values of true prayer, true fasting and true, selfless giving. Again, the problem that Jesus confronts is not that they are seeking after too much, but that they have settled for too little...

(Continued in the full version. To purchase the full version of *Living in the Promised Land* go to Sacredise.com)

Resources

Liturgies

The liturgies offered here are set out in a modular form allowing for the various elements to be rearranged according to the needs of the local church or the particular service in which they are used. The basic layout as provided here provides for the four-fold shape of the liturgy - Gathering / Listening (or The Service of the Word) / Response (which may or may not include the Service of the Table) / Sending.

The Service of the Table is provided as a separate liturgy at the end of this section, and can be slotted into the liturgy of any Sunday where it is required.

Suggestions are also offered for response stations to be incorporated into the service. These stations are designed to give worshippers the opportunity to reflect and respond on their experience in the worship, and can be made as simple or as elaborate as the setting may require. It is not necessary to use all of the station ideas each week, but only those that will work well in the particular service in which they are used.

Some hymn suggestions are offered for each Sunday, but they are not placed within the liturgy in order to allow for greater freedom of hymn choice and service design by local liturgists.

NOTE: This sample gives only some of the elements of the Ash Wednesday liturgy and of the Service of the Table. In the complete eBook, every Sunday has prayers for all four movements of the service, and the complete Service of the Table liturgy.

Ash Wednesday

Gathering:

Invocation:

O God, who led the people of Israel through the wilderness,
and sustained Jesus through his time of testing in the desert,

***Come to us again in our Lenten journey,
lead us through this time of reflection and repentance,
and establish your Reign in our lives again.***

In Jesus' Name

Amen.

Adoration:

Psalms 63:1-8

O God, You are my God; I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You; my whole body longs for You in this parched and weary land where there is no water.

***I have seen You in Your sanctuary and gazed upon Your power and glory.
Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise You!***

I will praise You as long as I live, lifting up my hands to You in prayer.

You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise You with songs of joy.

I lie awake thinking of You, meditating on You through the night.

***Because You are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of Your wings.
I cling to You; Your strong right hand holds me securely.***

God of Challenging Grace and Transforming Love,

We praise you for seasons of reflection

when we can take stock of our lives,
and re-order our priorities;

We praise you for the practices of prayer, fasting and giving,

that re-align our hearts with your values,
and reconnect our ways with your purposes;

We praise you for your presence, and for your guiding Spirit,

that daily calls us to follow Jesus,
and that enables us to know eternity now.

We praise you, Triune God,

***for not allowing us to settle for a life
that is less than the Promised Land you offer,
and for empowering us to live
as true citizens of your Reign.***

Amen.

Confession:

A responsive paraphrase of Psalm 51:1-17

Because your love never fails, and your compassion is immense, O God,
have mercy on me and remove every sin-stain from me.

Wash away my guilt and make me clean,
even though I have often rebelled against you -
a truth which continues to haunt me.

***You are the one I've hurt, it's your eyes that see the evil in me;
when you call me out, you're right on target
and you are absolutely correct in your assessment of me.***

I have always been prone to destructiveness,
but you ask me for honesty, and you teach me tough wisdom.

***If you make me clean, then no smudge or stain will remain;
I'll be as pure as the freshest snow.***

I long for you to restore me to joy;
after this much needed time of humbling and brokenness
please free me to celebrate again....

Listening:**Illumination:**

O God, who constantly calls us by name,
***as we open the Scriptures, call us again,
and speak to us of the eternity
that we can know and experience now.***

Amen.

Intercession:

God of Now and Always,
In a world where news travels by the second,
and progress is measured in days or weeks,
teach us to expand our vision into eternity...

Responding:

It is traditional on Ash Wednesday to invite people forward to receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads in ash. You may want to offer a short prayer before calling the people forward.

As the ashes are imposed on the heads of the worshippers...

Sending:**Benediction:**

As you have touched eternity,

in this time and place
Go to live as a citizen of God's eternal Realm.
***We go in the name of Christ,
to reflect the grace and love of Christ,
in humility, generosity and simplicity.***
Amen.

Hymn Suggestions:

[The Glory Of These Forty Days](#)

[Be Thou My Vision](#)

[You Lead Us Through The Wilderness](#)

[In Your Mercy, Lord](#)

...

(Continued in the full version. To purchase the full version of *Living in the Promised Land* go to Sacredise.com)

Service of the Table

Thanksgiving:

Give thanks to God!

***We give thanks for God's love, God's life,
and the Promised Land of God's Reign
which is available to us all.***

It is God who formed us and gave us life.

It is God who covenants with us always to be our God,
and for us always to be God's people.

It is God who has shown us, through the law and the prophets,
and, finally, through Jesus, how we should live and love.

And it is God who, when we went our own way,
ignored God's Word and fell into destruction and death,
came to us in Christ,
and made a way for us to be healed, restored and resurrected...

Preparation:

...

This meal enables us to share in all that Jesus was and did.

This meal invites us into a new way of being -
the way of grace, justice, peace and love.

This meal gives us a glimpse of God's Reign -
the Promised Land that was birthed among us
by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Thanks be to God!

And so we remember the night when Jesus first gave us this meal:

We remember how he took bread, gave thanks and broke it,
and then gave it to his disciples saying:

This is my body broken for you. Eat it to remember me.

We remember how he took the cup of wine...

And so we eat and drink and remember,
and we will continue to do this

until God's Reign completely captures our hearts,
and is completely revealed in our world,
at the return of Christ.

Amen.

Breaking of Bread:

As we share together this one loaf of bread,
we share in Christ's body, Christ's life and Christ's mission.

And we become one, even as we share in the one loaf.

Amen...

Prayer After The Meal:

We thank you, Jesus, for this meal
that reminds us of your life,
that connects us with your presence,
and that shows us what your Promised Land is like.

***We receive it with thanks,
and with a new commitment to live
as your members of your body.***

Amen.

(Continued in the full version. To purchase the full version of *Living in the Promised Land* go to Sacredise.com)

Resources

Small Group
Guidelines

These small group guidelines are given here in order to help people engage in the Lenten journey in a deeper and more focussed way. They include suggestions for ice-breakers, worship, and discussion around the Scriptures. Feel free to adapt these guides as necessary to suit your particular setting.

Please Note: No daily devotional guides are provided in this resource because they are provided for every day of the year through the [Sacredise Daily Worship Blog](#). Please check this out to receive each day's Daily Worship guide on the website, via RSS, or (if you sign up for the email list) via email. The latter option provides the whole week from Sunday to Saturday (with an option to download them in PDF format) sent out on the Thursday prior.

Ash Wednesday

Since Ash Wednesday is a mid-week service, it may be a good idea for your small groups to attend together. This can either replace the usual small group meeting, or, after the service, the groups can get together to share what the experience meant for them.

It may also be helpful to take some time in the group discussing the three Lenten disciplines of Fasting, Prayer and Giving (of time, talents and treasures). Commit together to embrace these disciplines for the Lenten season in some way, and hold each other accountable each week.

Lent 1

Ice Breaker:

- 1) How are your Lenten disciplines going?
- 2) Have you ever felt really homesick? Share what this felt like, and how you handled the feeling.

Worship Suggestion:

Begin in a moment of silent praise and thanksgiving for the way God has given us a home in God's love. Then, invite anyone who may wish to share a brief prayer of thanksgiving. Once everyone has had a chance, move into singing or speaking a hymn or two (Eg. *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*, *Praise To The Lord The Almighty*, *Creation's King*).

Move into a time of confession and intercession in which people are asked to reflect on those who do not have warm and welcoming homes, and on times when they have caused others to feel rejected. After doing this in silence, have someone pray a general prayer of confession and intercession for the group (make sure you prepare them for this beforehand).

Finish with thanksgiving for God's forgiveness and grace, and commitment to be people of welcome and hospitality, even as God has welcomed us. You may want to close this time a hymn (Eg. *O God Our Help In Ages Past*)

For Discussion:

Read:

Mark 1:9-15

Questions:

1. What stands out for you in this short description of the start of Jesus' ministry?
2. Why do you think Mark moves so quickly through the accounts of Jesus' baptism and temptation?
3. Why do you think, in this brief account, Mark takes the time to mention that was cared for by angels and wild animals?
4. What does the message that God's Reign is "at hand" mean for you?

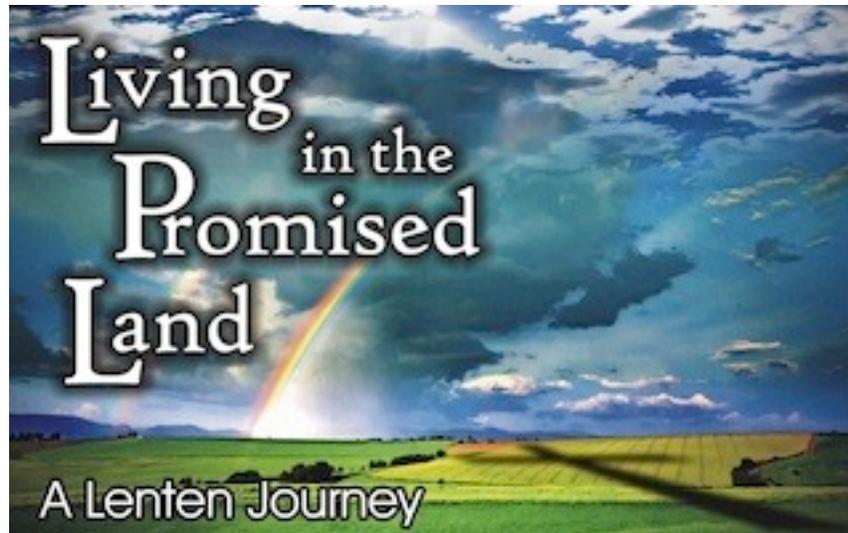
Resources

Graphics

*The following thumbnails give a sample of the various graphic files that are included with **Living in the Promised Land**. I have included only Lent 1 here, but the zip file containing the images, has similar graphics for every service through Lent.*

Lent Theme Title Slide

Use this slide as people enter the sanctuary throughout the Lenten season. I would usually replace this slide with the weekly title slides as the service begins, or just before.



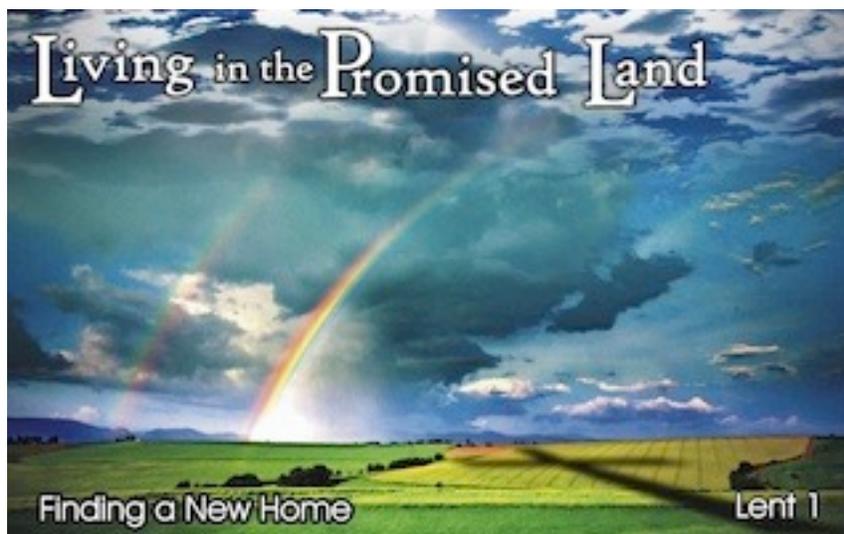
Weekly Title Slides

These slides are designed to be used each week to display the theme for that day. They can be used in place of blank screens throughout the service, and at the start of the service just after the Lent Theme Title Slide.



Weekly Sermon Slides

These slides are designed to be used as backgrounds for each week's sermon, should you put your sermon notes up on screen.



Lyrics Slide

This slide, which continues with the thematic imagery but has no text, is useful for displaying the lyrics of hymns, prayers or any other information.

