

Irrepressible

Find the resilience you need

A Liturgical Guide for Lent and Holy Week



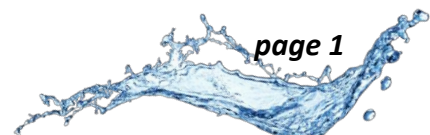
Irrepressible

Find the resilience you need

A Liturgical Guide
for Lent and Holy Week

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with Jenine Pretorius

Sacredise
Johannesburg



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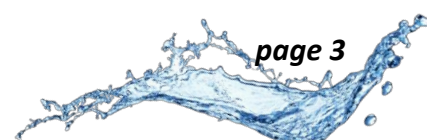
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Introduction

Have you ever started something enthusiastically, with great inspiration and strength, only to find that over time, you began to lose heart and struggled to keep going? Perhaps you've even started this year like that. You may have set intentions for the year and set up your systems and structures to bring them to fruition, only to hit obstacles and get derailed.

For many of us the pandemic has been one long, exhausting obstacle that has blocked us from fulfilling our hopes and dreams, kept us from connecting with others, and changed our lives for the worse. Even if we've managed to find joy and keep our lives on track, we may still be feeling depressed and depleted. Around the world the call is growing ever louder: we want things to go back to normal.

But what we knew as normal no longer exists and we can't yet see what the new normal will be like when it finally arrives. If we've learned anything from the last two years, it's that COVID-19 isn't going away anytime soon. We will be navigating this pandemic and its impact for years to come.

And that means that we desperately need a new and deeper capacity for resilience.

Irrepressible

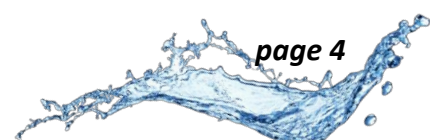
It is with exactly this reality in mind that I am excited to share the new liturgical guide from Sacredise entitled **IRREPRESSIBLE—Find the resilience you need**. This guide for Lent and Holy Week explores ten qualities that can empower us to find the resilience we need. In addition, from Monday to Wednesday in Holy Week, **IRREPRESSIBLE** explores three of Isaiah's *Servant Songs* to find what resilience meant for the prophet and how it was manifest in the life of Jesus.

This guide for communal worship will take you and your community on a journey from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday based on the Lectionary readings for Year C. And it gives you everything you need to ensure that your worship is deep and inspiring:

- Purpose written prayers and liturgies for every Sunday of Lent and every day of Holy Week;
- Sermon starter chapters for every Sunday in Lent and every day that you may want to preach in Holy Week;
- A theme-based Tenebrae liturgy for Maundy Thursday;
- A theme-based Easter Vigil for Holy Saturday;
- A theme-based Table Liturgy that can be used at any time during Lent.

For Personal Devotion

IRREPRESSIBLE offers two options for a personal devotional practice to accompany the community worship experience.



The first is as follows:

- Create some way for your congregation to remember the message they will hear in church. You can encourage them to take notes, or give them a summary of the sermon, or have a recording of your message posted on social media.
- You can also make the response and integration practices in this resource available for people to make use of through the week.

A better approach would be to make use of the accompanying *Personal Spiritual Practice Guide* that has been developed to work alongside this guide for community worship.

- The *Personal Spiritual Practice Guide* offers a specific practice for each day of the Lent and Holy Week journey.
- Each day builds on the previous practice, and is based on the sermon content from the relevant Sunday.
- In addition, it includes preparation, responding, and integrating practices to ensure that people can easily apply the message of each week to their own lives.

The *Personal Spiritual Practice Guide* is available separately in the Sacredise Store. If you purchase it after buying this *Liturgical Guide* you may consider it to be a bundle, which includes a **license for the daily practices to be distributed to congregation members** via email, messaging, print, or on your church's website or social media channels.

For Small Groups

I believe that small groups work best as a bridge between Sunday worship and personal spiritual practice. For this reason, I would recommend connecting your small group work with both Sunday's worship—encouraging the groups to repeat the call to worship, response, and integrating practices—and the daily practice guides—inviting groups to share their personal insights and experiences as they've worked with Sunday's message.

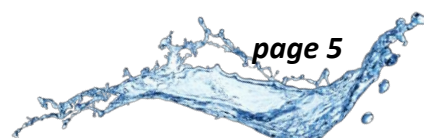
The following questions can be used as a helpful guide to sharing and conversation:

- What stood out for you in this week's reading, and in the message that was preached? Why do you think this particularly caught your attention?
- What does this 'word' mean to you for your spiritual walk in the next week, month, and year?
- How are you working to integrate this 'word' into your daily living?

It is my hope and prayer that **IRREPRESSIBLE** will not only be meaningful for you and your community, but that it will be transforming. I believe that a mindful and intentional use of the Lent and Holy Week seasons can teach us and empower us to find a deeper and more robust resilience to help us navigate the tough times that come to every life. And that is what I hope this guide will do for you!

May God guide and bless you as you nurture your resilience through Lent and Holy Week.

John



Irrepressible Dust

Ash Wednesday

Gathering

CALL TO WORSHIP

Begin with a time of silence and preparation. Invite people to consider what Lent means for them, and what work they want to do in the coming season. If appropriate you can invite them to consider how they will embrace the three Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting, and giving during this season. After a few moments of silence, the following prayer may be used.

There are so many voices in our lives, God,
telling us that we're not good enough,
that we need to change who we are,
that we have to earn the love we need.
And they hold power because they're not completely wrong;
we know the regrets, guilt and shame that we carry
from not living as our best selves,
the selves we want to be.

***And so we come here in search of forgiveness
and the strength to take hold of the life we long for;
We come seeking to embody the irrepressible qualities
that can carry us through all life's unexpected joys and sorrows;
And we come to be reminded of who we really are:
not just dust, but stardust made in your image.
Receive our worship, O God,
speak to our hearts,
and remind us of who we really are,
and of who we can become.***

Amen.

PRAYER OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION

On this Ash Wednesday we gather,
taking a moment to confess the times
we haven't lived from our best selves,
acknowledging our mortality.
***And we become aware of the areas which we want to improve,
the places we need to heal.***

When we look at our story so far,
it is easy to see the times when we reacted harshly,
the times when we were cruel and kept love from another.
We are sorry for sinking into our worst selves



and finding it too comfortable.

You have shown us, O God, that we are more than dust;
you call us friends,
and you value who we are more than we can imagine.

***Thank you for making us aware of the goodness within us,
for reminding us of our unique gifts.***

We long to live more fully into the image you have of us.

***Teach us to embrace your opinion of us
and your love for us,***

***And teach us to share your unconditional love with those around us,
so we may show them how valuable they are to you.***

Amen.

Listening

SCRIPTURE READING

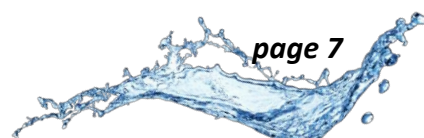
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

REFLECTION

Today is Ash Wednesday. It is a significant day in the Liturgical Calendar, but I doubt it is one of the most popular celebrations in our faith. Even the word 'celebration' seems strangely incongruous when speaking of Ash Wednesday. Traditionally this day is seen to be about confessing sin, acknowledging our mortality, and repenting or changing our ways to be more faithful, obedient, and righteous. It begins the Lenten season, which extends the confession and repentance into a six-week process. Originally, Lent was a time of preparation for baptismal candidates in which they would learn what it means to follow Christ before making their public commitment at their baptism on Easter Sunday.

This is not a bad thing in itself. There is great value in setting aside extended times to reflect on what it means to embrace the way of Christ and live it out more wholeheartedly in our daily lives. But there is also a danger here—at least in how Lent has been observed in my experience of the Church. A faith that makes us feel bad about ourselves is neither healthy nor likely to lead to the kind of positive transformation we seek. But this can easily be the effect of our observance of this season. It is common to hear phrases from our Scriptures and liturgies that reinforce the message that we are worthless sinners who deserve nothing but condemnation:

*The worst of sinners
A worm, not a human
Not worthy to gather up the crumbs
Deny yourself
Think of others as better than yourselves
Dust you are and to dust you will return...*



There is value in humility, recognising our flaws and brokenness, and committing to becoming more whole and generous. But ironically, the worse we feel about ourselves the less capable we are of doing this important work. We spiral into a deeper brokenness where we feel worthless, incapacitated, and paralysed by our self-loathing and/or self-doubt.

I was raised on Christian teachings about humility, confession, sin, repentance, denying myself and putting others first. It is in my DNA to think of myself as broken, unworthy, and in need of improvement. And I have gained much that I am grateful for in these teachings. But they also did me great harm. In denying myself, I lost my sense of self and allowed myself to become little more than a function of the needs of those around me. In always putting others first, I became empty and lost my capacity for enjoyment and vibrant living. In constantly focussing on what was wrong, inadequate, not-enough, or worthless about myself, I became incapable of seeing my giftedness, my value, my contribution, and my goodness. I allowed myself to be dismissed, humiliated, mistreated, and even abused because I felt that it was wrong to stand up for myself and I always worked hard to see things from the other person's perspective.

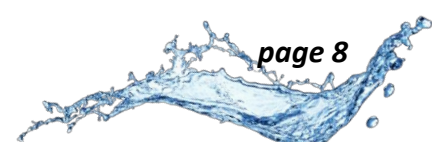
For most of my life, my faith had a very unhealthy impact on my sense of self. It took a long time, but eventually I realised that all this focus on how bad I was did not make me better. I was not more capable of serving others and I was not empowered to contribute more or to make more of a positive impact on my world. Rather, I found myself paralysed, withdrawn, and afraid to step out and show up, because I did not believe I had anything of value to give. I doubted my ideas and visions for doing ministry and I submitted myself to the agendas of my leaders, even when they were self-serving or hurtful to others. A faith that makes us feel less, bad, and unworthy is neither biblical nor spiritual.

But this is not all that Scripture tells us about ourselves. Jesus calls us friends. He claims that bringing abundant life is central to his mission. We are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' and God's good and loving thoughts about us 'cannot be numbered.' To love God and our neighbour we must also love ourselves. And we are not just dust. The molecules and atoms within us were born in the cosmos. It is a scientific fact that we are stardust!

For Ash Wednesday—and Lent—to be only about how bad we are, to see repentance only as admitting our sin and committing to be better, is neither healthy nor helpful. And it will not bring about the wholeness, goodness, and willingness to serve and give to others that we seek. It is when we have a vision of our best selves and we feel that we are good and whole—and constantly moving toward greater goodness and wholeness—that we are most able to live full and connected lives.

It is only those who are insecure and who feel inadequate and unworthy that crave the approval of others. These are the play-actors (hypocrites) to whom Jesus refers in his Sermon on the Mount. It is those who know that they are irrepressible (star)dust that don't need applause. These are the ones who can do their own work of growth and their generous work of serving others in quiet, unassuming ways regardless of the recognition or applause of others. And this is where abundant life is found.

In this series we will be exploring all the wonderful, good, true, and beautiful God-given qualities within us that are irrepressible, that lift us above our worst, and that carry us through times of



trauma like this pandemic. And we will be learning to embrace and celebrate that we are Irrepressible Dust—Cosmic, God-Imaged Stardust! I hope you'll come along for the ride!

Responding

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

God, you have given us glimpses of what we can be,
you have reminded us that we are more than dust;
we are stardust.

**Thank you for revealing
what we are often unable to see.**

These qualities within us are irrepressible,
they lift us out of our worst and carry us through tough times.

**And they invite us to live our fullest and most connected lives,
filled with wonder, goodness, beauty and truth.**

We ask for the strength to resist the temptation
to listen to the voices that say we are worthless.

May we remember the value that we have in you.

We think of those who still struggle to see their worth,
who still believe the voices that reduce their value.

**May we be those positive voices that shine light,
and speak life into their lives.**

And may we all live more fully into our stardust truths.

Amen.

RESPONSE RITUAL

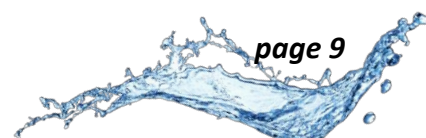
The people are invited to spend some time in silence as they reflect on how the message of this week's worship spoke to them. They may be invited to consider what caught their attention, what challenged or disturbed them, and what inspired or excited them.

After a few moments of silence the people can be invited to light a candle as symbol of embracing their God-imagined, stardust selves and living more intentionally from their best selves. They may also be encouraged to have a candle at home which they can light each day as a reminder of what they have learned and experienced in the worship.

As the people light their candle they may either use the following phrase or create their own as an aid to their meditation and to express what they have received through the worship:

May the light of God's image fill me and radiate from me into my world.

Following the lighting of the candle, you may proceed to the traditional Ash Wednesday response of making the sign of the cross in ash on our foreheads. If this service is held in-person this ritual can be performed with all necessary health and safety protocols in place. If it is held online via live stream or recording, people can be invited to prepare the ash for themselves and either make the



mark together with others in the household on one another's foreheads, or to use a mirror and make the mark on their own foreheads. Ashes can be prepared by burning dry leaves and mixing them with a little olive oil (don't use water - it can create a caustic mix that will burn).

As the ash cross is made, the following words may be said:

You are dust and you will return to dust,

and you are stardust reflecting the image of God.

Embrace who you are

and live abundantly in Christ's power.

Amen.

Integrating

BENEDICTION

As the service draws to a close the people are invited to greet one another with the following words (or another traditional greeting may be used):

May God's grace and love fill you with courage and confidence

to embrace your best self

and live fully, abundantly, and freely in Christ's life-giving way.

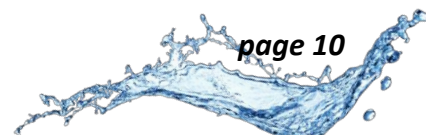
Amen.

SENDING RITUAL

The people are invited to pause before they leave and think of one thing they can do this week that will connect them more deeply with their best, 'stardust' selves. After a few moments of silence, the people are sent out with the following encouragement:

Go and live as the God-imagined, stardust people you are and share God's radiant life with your world.

Amen.



To download the full version of the

Irrepressible

Liturgical Guide

go to:

<https://sacredise.com/product/irrepressible-liturgical-guide-pdf/>