



Full to the Brim

An expansive lent

SERMON PLANNING GUIDE *for Lent-Easter {Year C}*

Featuring Biblical commentary by
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Guide developed by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

INTRODUCTION

How to use this guide

We hope this guide is your starting point for shaping your sermons, worship services, and scripture study classes. For each Sunday in Lent through Easter, we have included theme connections, biblical commentary, guiding questions, and links to further reading and materials.¹ We hope these offer a few ways of approaching and thinking about the texts in light of our theme and weekly sub-themes. We encourage you to use this guide as a companion to the poetry, visual art, devotional, and materials in the bundle—allowing all of the words, images, and ideas to cross-pollinate. You can find full-length artist statements inspired by each of the focal texts listed in this guide in our Visual Art Collection. Consider mapping out your ideas in our accompanying Sermon Planning Grid.

About the theme: *Full to the Brim, an Expansive Lent*

The scriptures for this Lenten season (in the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C) are filled with parables and promises of God's abundant and expansive grace. Jesus as a mother hen, a prodigal son welcomed home, a fig tree nurtured with care and hope, precious oil poured out lovingly and freely, stones shouting out with praise—these sacred texts are brimming with a gospel of grace. We've done nothing to deserve or earn this grace, and yet, like water, it spills over. *Full to the Brim* is an invitation—into a radically different Lent, into a full life. It's an invitation to be authentically who you are, to counter scarcity and injustice at every turn, to pour out even more grace wherever it is needed. It disrupts the scarcity mentality that capitalism, oppression, or hierarchy can plant inside of us. When we allow ourselves to be filled to the brim with God's lavish love, that love spills over. It reaches beyond ourselves; like water, it rushes and flows, touching everything in its path.

We recognize that traditional iterations of Lent often emphasize restraint, confession, and piety. The origins of Lent were that one was to leave their old life behind to fast and prepare to be baptized into a new way of living. In essence, this was a practice of stepping away from the rat race, corrupt power, scarcity mentality, and empty rituals in order to live a more expansive and full life of faith. And so, *Full to the Brim* trusts the promise of our baptisms—God has already claimed us as God's own and nothing we can do will ever change or erase that.

Full to the Brim doesn't ignore or deny sin and suffering. It doesn't absolve accountability for wrongdoing. Instead it contextualizes our faith. If love is our beginning, how can we live our lives led by love's promises? It reminds us to live fully—as we pursue justice and hope, or express grief and gratitude. And so, this Lent, let us trust—fully—that we belong to God. Let us increase our capacity to receive and give grace. Let us discover the expansive life God dreams for us.

¹ Under the "Further Reading and Research" sections, we direct you to the work of authors, scholars, thinkers, and writers who might inform or enhance your sermonic message. We do not own the rights to these works. We encourage you to patronize and support these authors and creators.



Focal Scriptures Luke 13:1-9 | Isaiah 55:1-9

Theme Connections

Like the fig tree, you are worthy. You're not a lost cause. You're not a waste of resources. You deserve audacious hope. You deserve to be nurtured. Your fruit will come. Like the gardener, you are invited to see others with audacious hope and budding potential. The lesson of the fig tree invites us to unpack the source of our worth in a system and society that often measures worthiness by commerce, production, output, success, status, achievement, ethnicity, and/or gender identity. We might ask, "Can the fig tree have worth even if it never produces any figs?" What does that mean for us if the answer is "yes"? Patience, nurture, asset-based thinking, and audacious hope are counter-cultural practices needed for an expansive life.

Commentary on Luke 13:1-9 | by Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia

"Wait a little longer."

"Work hard to show what you are capable of."

"Trust me..."

As a Person of Color, I hear these comments on a regular basis. On my best days, this commentary ignites a fire to change the systems and structures that regularly oppress marginalized people. Other times I wonder, "Am I being pacified *just enough* to stick around?"

The first thing I want to know is why a fig tree is in the midst of a vineyard. The tree would not be of primary focus in a field cultivating grapes, apparently planted only so that no inch of the ground is squandered.

Many of us experience the world as a fig tree in the midst of grape vines. We are placed in fields not meant for us and yet expected to thrive. People discount and doubt us, threatening to cut us down if we don't produce in the ways that have been defined *on our behalf*. We are afterthoughts demanded to bear fruit or be destroyed.

The story of the fig tree reminds us that the world's expectations do not need to be ours. The gardener puts their faith in that which they have no control. Digging a bigger hole and filling it with manure, they tend to the tree with everything it needs to grow into its purpose. Perhaps this means bearing figs. Or maybe it provides shade for the laborers during the harvest, an opportunity for the gardener to tend to the fields in a new way, or transformation of the owner's ability to see beyond the commodification of the land.

Those of us living a fig tree existence are invited to be nourished and tended to so that, in time, we grow into our purpose. People with power are reminded to disrupt their knowledge of how the world works and their complicity in earthly systems and measurements so that everyone has an opportunity to thrive. And still others provide nurture in solidarity, trusting that intentional care will lead to new life.

Together, we invest in a fruitful Creation.

Guiding Q's

- In her commentary, Rev. Larissa Kwong Abazia questions why the fig tree is planted in a vineyard. She concludes that the fig tree has been "planted only so that no inch of the ground is squandered." Who in your midst is living a "fig tree existence"? What patterns and systems need to be disrupted in order to invest in a fruitful Creation for everyone?
- In her poem, "What I Forgot," Rev. Sarah Speed writes: "*Sometimes I wish I was the fig tree / because she knows / what I forgot / many years ago. / You are still worthy / even if / you don't produce.*" What practices help you disentangle your worth from your productivity? What practices remind you of your inherent worth?
- When have you acted like the landowner, seeing someone or something as a waste of resources? What does it look like to practice audacious hope in these circumstances?

Full to the Brim { *You are worthy* (cont.)

Further Reading & Research

Read “How to cultivate a sense of unconditional self-worth” by Adia Gooden. *Ideas.Ted.Com*. November 18, 2020. ideas.ted.com/how-to-cultivate-a-sense-of-unconditional-self-worth

(Note: In her Ted Talk, clinical psychologist Dr. Adia Gooden shares about her personal journey in feeling unworthy and practices that can help you develop unconditional self-worth.)

Listen “Atlanta-Based Organization Advocates For Rest As A Form Of Social Justice.” *All Things Considered*, NPR. Interview hosted by Sarah McCammon with guest Tricia Hersey. June 4, 2020.

npr.org/2020/06/04/869952476/atlanta-based-organization-advocates-for-rest-as-a-form-of-social-justice

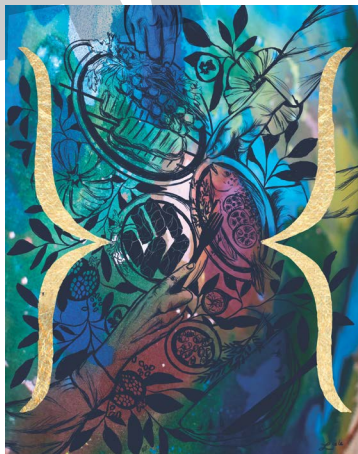
(Note: In this interview, Tricia Hersey, who coined herself the “Nap Bishop,” shares about what led her to start The Nap Ministry, an organization that advocates for rest as a form of resistance. In the interview, she shares: “Slavery was horrific, and the times—during those times for black people, we were human machines. And so grind culture continues today to try and attempt to make us all human machines and not to see the divinity of who we really are. And so rest is disrupting that history. It's undoing part of that history, and it's allowing us to connect to our deepest selves.” Learn more about The Nap Ministry by visiting: thenapministry.wordpress.com or instagram.com/thenapministry)

Watch *Maid*. Season 1, episode 9, “Sky Blue,” created by Molly Smith Metzler, released in 2021 on Netflix. netflix.com/title/81166770

(Note: This limited series, inspired by Stephanie Land's memoir, “*Maid: Hard Work, Low Pay, and a Mother's Will to Survive*”, tracks the travails of a young mother and her child fleeing domestic violence and trying to build a new life. Episode 9 includes a scene when the mother, “Alex,” has landed back at a domestic violence shelter. The host of the shelter takes Alex “shopping,” bringing her to the shelter’s boutique filled with gently-used, second-hand clothing. She hands her a shopping basket and invites her to “shop” for any clothes she wants and needs. Alex soon learns that the shopping tags and even the cash register are all props to create a feeling of normalcy, as everything in the boutique is free. This poignant scene captures Alex’s shock, dismay, and discomfort in being given a gift she doesn’t “earn” through monetary or commercial standards. And yet, the scene illustrates the inherent worth and dignity each human deserves. This scene in particular begins around 22 minutes into the episode.)



You Are Worthy
by Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
Inspired by Luke 13:1-9



Worthy of Being Fed
by Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Inspired by Isaiah 55:1-9