



CREATIVE RESOURCES FOR LENT YEAR B

RESOURCES INCLUDED IN BUNDLE

- 1. DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET** (A printable devotional booklet with: scripture, commentary, poetry, visual art, coloring, and written reflections).
- 2. SERMON PLANNING GUIDE** (A guide offering biblical commentary by Denise Anderson, as well as theme connections and links to further reading for the gospel lectionary scriptures from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
- 3. WORDS FOR WORSHIP** (Written liturgy inspired by the theme and the RCL scriptures for Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
- 4. WORSHIP ART PROJECT** (An interactive prayer wall to install outside your church building as a public art installation encouraging continuous prayer throughout the season).
- 5. 16 NEW VISUALS W/ ARTIST STATEMENTS** (Illuminating the lectionary scriptures for Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday).
- 6. AGAIN & AGAIN BRANDING BUNDLE** (Logo files and graphic templates to help you share the Again & Again theme in your print and online communications).
- 7. POETRY PRAYERS** (10 poems inspired by our theme and weekly sub-themes).
- 8. CREATIVE LITURGY FOR ASH WEDNESDAY** (An interactive liturgy for worshiping via different formats—Zoom, in-person, or at home with no screens. This liturgy will help us begin the Lenten season with intention).
- 9. A CREATIVE SERVICE FOR HOLY WEEK** (Crafted by Denise Anderson, this service will create space for lamenting Christ's crucifixion and the far too many times state-sanctioned violence has been repeated throughout history).
- 10. DAILY DEVOTIONAL CARDS** (Printable cards with daily prompts for building a daily rhythm of prayer).
- 11. A MEDITATIVE THEME SONG VIDEO** (A worship video featuring our theme song, written and recorded by The Many. This will likely be released after our initial launch of the Lent resources, so stay tuned).

ABOUT THE THEME

In Lent, we're reminded that, again and again, suffering and brokenness find us. We doubt again, we lament again, we mess up again. Again and again, the story of Jesus on the cross repeats—every time lives are taken unjustly, every time the powerful choose corruption and violence, every time individuals forget how to love. With exacerbation we exclaim, "Again?! How long, O God?" And yet, in the midst of the motion blur chaos of our lives, God offers a sacred refrain: "I choose you, I love you, I will lead you to repair." Again and again, God breaks the cycle and offers us a new way forward.

This theme provides a clear invitation in a time when much is unclear. Even if worshiping apart, we come to God again and again with our prayers, our dreams, our hopes, and our doubts. Even if from a distance, we will continue to be community to one another—especially when it's hard—by choosing each other over and over again. We will continue to love God with the same persistence God chooses and claims us. Our sub-theme, *A Lenten Refrain*, speaks to the ways God can make music of our lives. "Refrain" also reminds us that Lent is a season of abstaining from certain or harmful practices in order to take on new rhythms and habits.

In this season, we need rituals—both old and new—to remember and be transformed. Embodied practice builds muscle memory. Repetition helps retrain our neural pathways. We need the 46 days of Lent because this season shapes us into more faithful disciples. Join us this Lent as again and again, we bring all of who we are to God and trust that God will meet us, time and again, along the way.

FOCAL SCRIPTURES

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



ASH WEDNESDAY

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE'RE INVITED IN

Matthew 6:1-16, 16-21 | Isaiah 58:1-12

As Lent begins, we're invited in—to community, to this season, to our own spiritual journey, to true transformation. We're on this journey together, but we're invited to turn inward. Therefore, spiritual practices are not for show. Matthew 6 and Isaiah 58 remind us that performative acts (of piety and justice) are not the way.



THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

AGAIN & AGAIN, GOD MEETS US

Mark 1:9-15 | Genesis 9:8-17

God meets Jesus at the water before he is tempted in the wilderness—this is important. First and foremost, God claims us. God meets us in the liminal space, at the water's edge, at the threshold of something new, and names us Beloved. God's covenant with all of creation reminds us that God meets us where we are—in the midst of our reluctance, doubt, eagerness, or weariness—and proclaims we are good.



THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE CALLED TO LISTEN

Mark 8:31-9:8¹ | Psalm 22:23-31

Like the disciples, we are often stuck in the pattern of messing up over and over again. We cling to power, we climb the ladder, we memorialize Christ's teachings rather than embodying them. However, we can't be trapped by shame, guilt, ignorance, or inaction. Humility is required for transformation. Again and again, we are called to listen—to God and to others.



THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE SHOWN THE WAY

John 2:13-22 | 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

According to John, Jesus begins his ministry by showing more than telling. In the temple, Jesus disrupts and overturns the systems of corruption and profiteering taking place, but ultimately points us to the promise of restoration. Paul reminds the Corinthians (and us) that God's wisdom is more expansive than we can imagine. We are shown the way, even if God's "way" feels foolish, counter-cultural, disruptive, or uncomfortable.

¹ The RCL includes the option to preach Mark 9:1-9 (Transfiguration) for this Sunday in addition to Mark 8:31-38. We decided to combine these lections into one longer reading for narrative continuity.



THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

AGAIN & AGAIN, GOD LOVES FIRST

John 3:14-21 | Ephesians 2:1-10

After inviting Nicodemus to be born anew, Jesus tells him in John 3 that God so loved the world that God sent his son to restore it. Therefore, when we read John 3:16, we remember that Jesus is speaking in metaphor and poetry. Ultimately, love is where God begins and ends. This love, like grace, is a gift we do nothing to deserve. Again and again, love is our refrain. Before we act, think, or believe, can love be first for us too?



THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE REFORMED

John 12:20-33 | Jeremiah 31:31-34

We desire for God to write on our hearts so that God's law can re-shape and re-form us from the inside out. Reformation is a journey of letting the old fall away for something new to emerge, of returning to God's words over and over, of being drawn into the heart of God. This is the process of justification and sanctification; transformation must be internal and communal.



PALM / PASSION SUNDAY

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE DRAW ON COURAGE

John 12:1-19²

On Palm Sunday, we remember that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was not a risk-free, palm party. It was a protest parade—a protest against those in power, a parade to prepare the way for a different kind of king. And this was all happening with plots to kill Lazarus (and Jesus) building in the background. We're reminded that the crowds were brave to show up that day, and that Jesus drew on courage to face his journey to the cross. The root of courage is *cour*, meaning "heart." Courage is deep within us; we often find it when we most need it, when everything else has been stripped away.



MAUNDY THURSDAY

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE ARE HELD TOGETHER

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Footwashing is a practice of radical vulnerability, of being seen and known. Jesus loved the disciples "to the end." In this act, we remember that God holds all of our pain, vulnerability, doubts, and sufferings. As we venture toward the cross, we can lean into God's everlasting arms, knowing we are held.



GOOD FRIDAY

AGAIN & AGAIN, WE FIND OURSELVES HERE

John 19:1-30

Again and again, we find ourselves at the foot of the cross, at the pit of despair, in the face of death, in the grip of state-sanctioned violence. "Here" is an emotional place. "Here" is grief. "Here" is the reality of sin and brokenness. On Good Friday, we are called to sit in the silence of death, knowing that God is here.

² The RCL only includes v.12-16 of John 12. However, we've expanded the reading to provide more context and narrative cohesion to bridge the gap between palms and passion. It's important to note that we are going backward in the narrative from the 5th Sunday's reading of John.



EASTER SUNDAY

AGAIN & AGAIN, THE SUN RISES

Mark 16:1-8

According to Mark, on the first day of the week, the women rise with the sun and buy spices to anoint Jesus' body. They are shocked to find the tomb empty, and leave in fear and terror. Mark's resurrection story is less triumphant than the other Gospel testimonies (as scholars believe the remainder of Mark's gospel was a later addition). In Mark's version, we are reminded that Easter comes to us, again and again, even if we don't know what to make of God's resurrection ways. Again and again, the sun rises. And some days, that is enough.

ABOUT THE LOGO & BRANDING

"When discussing photography for the theme, we explored visual patterns found in nature and human design; however, we noticed that the expansiveness of the theme was minimized with any recognizable imagery. Therefore, we decided it best to capture movement and high contrast, while avoiding any particular subject matter. As I worked with typography for the words 'Again and Again,' I changed the 'and' to an ampersand, and became fixated on the visual flow of the shape. After many attempts of including imagery, as well as the word 'again' in the logo, it became clear that simplifying was the way to go. The ampersand became the main symbol and focal point of the branding. Visually, it has similarities to the infinity symbol or a music staff. It could represent our winding Lenten journey; the curves mimic the cycles of our faith, and the repetitive patterns that can both trap or ground us. Mostly, the ampersand emphasizes God's holy 'and.' When we become weary from the motion blur chaos of our lives, God promises that there is always more to the story—death does not have the last word. We decided to place the motion blur photography inside the ampersand to represent how our brokenness, lament, and destructive cycles are part of our reality, but they don't take up the entirety of the view. In the ampersand, in God's sacred 'and,' the chaos is contained, held, and transformed into beauty with the light of sunrise on resurrection morning."

— The Revs. Lauren Wright Pittman & Lisle Gwynn Garrity

- Provide copies of our Lenten devotional booklet for older youth and adults. If your church has a Facebook group, utilize that platform to discuss the prompts and content in the devotional. Or use the daily devotional in small groups to discuss the scriptures, poetry, reflections, and art. If you are unable to print the booklet, we will provide a file best suited for use on screens and devices.
- Provide copies of our devotional cards to youth, college students, and families interested in a quick but meaningful daily prayer prompt. If you desire, you could also text or email the daily prompts to your community.
- Create our worship art project, installing a prayer wall outside your church building for anyone—including pedestrians—to interact with. We'll provide full instructions as well as ideas for COVID-friendly ways to engage your community in this installation.
- Distribute our Ash Wednesday liturgy to individuals and families to use for worship and prayer at home, especially those unable to come to the church for the imposition of ashes (due to COVID safety protocols).
- Use our liturgy to host a Holy Week service that invites your community to sit in the silence of Christ's death, resisting the urge to skip over the pain to get to Easter morning. This liturgy will be adaptable for live streamed, Zoom, and socially-distant worship.

IDEAS FOR WORSHIP & PROGRAMMING

ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



T. DENISE ANDERSON

Rev. T. Denise Anderson is writing biblical commentary that will be featured in our devotional and sermon planning guide. She is also crafting a creative liturgy for Holy Week.

Denise Anderson is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and coordinator for racial and intercultural justice with the Presbyterian Mission Agency, working in connection with the agency's Compassion, Peace & Justice and 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.



THE MANY

The many are writing and recording an original song inspired by our theme, "Again & Again." They will offer you the sheet music for the song, and their recording of the song will be featured in our theme song video.

The Many is an indie, intentionally diverse music collective from Chicago singing music of faith and doubt, hope and lament. The lead singers in The Many—Darren Calhoun, Leslie Michelle, and singer/songwriter Hannah Rand—as well as writer Lenora Rand and musician/producer Gary Rand, come together around their shared love of music and commitment to honest expressions of faith, peace-making, economic and racial justice, and LGBTQ+ inclusion. The Many offer songs made for reflection, for protest, for healing, and worship. They are songs made for singing with each other, in churches, in living rooms, in basements, and in bars. . . anywhere and everywhere, in spirit and in truth. With lyrics born from scriptures, from headlines, and from

their own experiences, this is not head-in-the-clouds "worship music." These are not songs about a God who only loves some of us. These are feet-on-the-ground, heart-in-hands, scars-revealed, wild and holy songs of resistance and reconciliation and restoration. This unique group of musicians reminds us over and over again that we aren't alone, that God so loves every one of us, and we all belong here. themanyarehere.com

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME

"I most easily identify with the negative connotations associated with the phrase, 'Again & Again.' Each day I wake up, it feels like an echo chamber of bad news, an endless cycle of disappointment, and the disconcerting kind of déjà vu. The truth is, we as humans mess things up over and over again. Humanity's cacophonous rhythm of 'again and again' harms our neighbor, ourselves, and the entirety of creation. You'd think we'd learn from our mistakes, perhaps take a lesson from history, and put an end to this cycle. But I've gotta be honest; as of late, I've almost lost hope in us. Which leads me to God's again and again. I'm so unbelievably grateful for the ways God shows up over and over again despite our best efforts to push God away. Thank God that we are not left alone in our destructive cadence, but we are met by God, repeatedly forgiven, and mercifully shown the way. I hope to be ever cognizant of humanity's 'again and again,' and resist the currents that keep us spinning in sin. I also hope to lean into and cling to God's 'again and again,' which is ultimately this wonderful pattern of unearned grace."

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

"Once we come up with a theme name, Lauren and I collaborate on the visual branding for the theme. As a graphic designer, Lauren crafts the logo, and I provide photography to enhance her design elements. As we began working on Again & Again, our brainstorming led us to hone in on the ampersand, an ancient symbol with thousands of visual iterations. No matter how the ampersand appears, its meaning still translates. After some quick research, we learned that the ampersand was first used in graffiti in Pompeii—a city buried in volcanic ash, and yet whose story lives on. This changed how we looked at the theme; the ampersand began to represent God's holy 'and.' When we feel helpless and hopeless, 'and' encourages us to lift our weary eyes to search for more. In a culture overrun by extremes, either/or thinking, and polarizing politics, this holy 'and' reminds me that we are always more—that there is always more. We are broken and beautiful. Joy and grief can coexist. Historical, systemic oppression persists and God is guiding us closer to liberation and wholeness. The future feels bleakly uncertain and we are granted sacred moments that sustain us in the present. This Lent, let us practice the power of 'and'—especially when 'again?!' feels like our never-ending cry of lament."

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

"I grew up in a family where church was not an option. We were there, every single week, rain or shine. Therefore, as you might have guessed, it was not long into adolescence when I asked the question, 'Why do we have to go to church every siiiiiingle week?' (Cue the dramatic eye roll.) My dad, with love, simply responded, 'Because we are a forgetful people.' For my parents, it was not enough that my brother and I heard that we were loved and were called to be love every once in a while. They needed us to hear that truth every single week, again and again, day in and day out, lest we forget. Fast forward several years, and that is now how I feel about Lent. I believe that we need the stories of Lent and the hope of Holy Week every single year, because there is something about ashes on foreheads, meals around tables, the darkness of the tomb, and the unstoppable hope of Easter that changes us. So once again, we walk this path together. And once again, God will meet us along the way. And once again, I am confident that we will be changed. Again and again, this world has known suffering, so again and again, we proclaim hope."

— **Rev. Sarah Are,** Founding Creative Partner

"As we explored theme options for this bundle, the tension between hope and fear was palpable all around us. It was February, 2020, before the pandemic hit. In the months that have followed, amidst the pain, the angst, the frustration, the oppression, the worldly, relational, human challenges that surround us, the sun still rises, every day. Smiles are possible, love is steadfast, joy can be found, and despite or perhaps because of all of the negatives, God shows up. In the small moments, in the regularity of rising and resting, God shows her beauty, God shows her love, God shows her care, again and again."

— **Hannah Garrity,** Founding Creative Partner