



## Year B (2024) – Lent

# **RETHINKING RELIGION**

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### **SERIES EXPLANATION**

Everyone has assumptions about God. Likewise, everyone has assumptions about religion. Increasingly, those assumptions are negative. Americans are walking away from Christianity in breathtaking numbers. It raises the question. How do those people know if their assumptions about religion are correct? Do they really understand Christianity at all? Do we? Do we truly understand this religion?

In the season of Lent, as much as any other, Jesus teaches things that turns the world's assumptions about religion completely upside down. We call it "Christianity." So, in this holy season, let us go straight to Christ and let him replace assumptions with truth. Jesus, help us to rethink religion!

Our worship follows this pattern.

Ash Wednesday	<i>Rethinking Our Priorities</i>
First Sunday in Lent	<i>Rethinking Trials, Tests, and Temptations</i>
Second Sunday in Lent	<i>Rethinking Suffering under the Cross</i>
Third Sunday in Lent	<i>Rethinking the Worth of Worship</i>
Fourth Sunday in Lent	<i>Rethinking the Solution to Sin</i>
Fifth Sunday in Lent	<i>Rethinking Devoted Commitment</i>
Sunday of the Passion	<i>Rethinking Real Strength</i>
Holy Thursday	<i>Rethinking Our Appetites</i>
Good Friday	<i>Rethinking Sacrifice</i>

### **RESOURCE REMINDER**

**Ash Wednesday Confessional Rite.** *Service Builder* contains a wealth of optional resources. To find this rite and additional Holy Week options, "Insert / Rite." Then search in the drop down at the top left under Seasonal Inserts. Note that this rite may be used with or without the Imposition of Ashes. The rite is preceded by a lengthy Introduction to Holy Week which provides background to pastors (not content for a worship folder). Click on this intro and use the delete dropdown to remove it from the worship folder.

The occasional resource reminders in The Foundation do not mention every possibility, just a few to assure that users occasionally check for these options.

**Sunday of the Passion—Year B.** In *Worship the Lord* #113 several pastors describe how they combine a Palm Sunday emphasis with a reading of the Passion History. It is available here:

[worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-hymnal-introduction-series](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/worship-the-lord-hymnal-introduction-series).

A variety of resources are available at [worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/service-folders-palm-sunday](http://worship.welsrc.net/download-worship/service-folders-palm-sunday). These options can serve both congregations with the new hymnal and those using CW93.

*Service Builder* provides a responsive prayer for Lent 1.



Ash Wednesday

February 14, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING OUR PRIORITIES**

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### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

That potential promotion at work. The third date, which will signal if there is real potential in this relationship. The test this Friday, which will determine if you make honor roll or not. The game on Sunday with the playoffs on the line. So many things that compete for our attention! It's easy to think of religion as just another of many activities to cram into our schedules. Sometimes, perhaps, the schedule is just too crowded.

So, Jesus lovingly whispers into our ear, "Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust." Those are the words spoken as a dead body is planted in the ground. The reality is that our time in this world is so short. After comes eternity, spent in one of two very different places. Jesus wants us to grasp that somber truth so we rethink where he should fall among all our priorities. Death can come at any time. So now is the time to cling to Christ in true repentance. Not later. Now. There is no higher priority.

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Joel 2:12-19 – Through the prophet Joel, the LORD tells us that our top priority is to return to him in true repentance. We will find that the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

Revelation 3:1-3 – Jesus tells a spiritually dead church what their top priority should be: wake up, repent, and remember what they had heard about God's grace.

\*Luke 12:13-21 – Jesus tells a parable about a man who forgot that we are all turning back into dust—a man with badly misguided priorities.

### HYMNS

Opening	393 Savior, When In Dust to You
HOD	654 Jesus Sinners Does Receive
Third/Distr	
Closing	420 Jesus, I Will Ponder Now

### SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* includes "Ash Wednesday Confessional Rite," a longer responsive penitential dialogue. It allows for the inclusion of the Imposition of Ashes, though it can easily be used without it.



First Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**  
**RETHINKING TRIALS, TESTS,**  
**AND TEMPTATIONS**

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**EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

*"If God loves us, why doesn't he remove all the trials and tests and temptations that we face?"* That question demonstrates the religious assumption that those things are bad. They aren't. In the hands of a loving God, they are tools by which he refines our faith. He uses tests as a way to compel us to be less self-reliant, and instead trust in his strength. He uses trials to teach us that this broken world is not our true home. God even takes Satan's temptations and uses them for our good.

Trials, tests, and temptations are not exceptions to God's love. That's a false assumption! These are examples of God's love. Proof is that God allowed his beloved Son Jesus to face trials and temptations, so that he might be our perfect savior and substitute.

**READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

\*Genesis 22:1-18 – God gives Abraham a test which will demonstrate who Abraham loves and trusts most.

Romans 8:31-39 – The proof of God's love is not that he removes all our trouble. The proof of God's love is that he gave us his Son. If he did that, nothing can separate us from God's love.

Mark 1:12-15 – Sometimes we fail to stand firm in trial or temptation. But by grace the kingdom of God is still ours because Jesus, as our substitute, perfectly overcame all of Satan's temptations.

**HYMNS**

Opening	404 Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing
HOD	864 A Mighty Fortress Is Our God
Third/Distr	525 The Lamb
Closing	833 I Run to Christ

**SERVICE OPTIONS**

Traditionally, the Gloria is omitted in Lent. One option is to utilize a hymn from the "Confession and Absolution" section (650-658) in its place. A fine choice would be 652:1,2. It would replace the Kyrie as well, as it is sung in the refrain. Ending after verse 2 has the congregation concluding this modified penitential rite by singing about the events of Good Friday. A variation would be to have a cantor/small group sing the verses, with the congregation joining in on the refrain.

If 883 is new, consider having a cantor sing the first verse. It could be the closing hymn multiple weeks for memorization.



Second Sunday in Lent

February 25, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING SUFFERING UNDER THE CROSS**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

We know that the cross was an instrument of torture and execution. However, Scripture also uses the term “cross” to refer to any suffering that one endures because he is believer: the painful denial of the desires of the flesh; ridicule and persecution from unbelievers; etc. This is one reason people reject religion. They see Christians struggling in life with these crosses, while non-Christians often seem perfectly happy. Even the prophet Jeremiah asked, “Why do all the faithless live at ease?” (12:1).

Today, Jesus asks us to rethink suffering under the cross. It is not pointless pain. Our crosses are not how we pay for sin. Jesus already did that on his cross. Our crosses are not redemptive, but they are constructive. Any suffering unbelievers face is only bad, a foretaste of worse to come. But the suffering believers face under the cross is only good, a way Christ connects us tightly to himself with fire-tested faith.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Job 1:13-22 – Job is given a heavy cross, but it does not crush his faith. Instead, God uses Job’s cross to move Job to worship and praise the LORD.

Romans 5:1-11 – St. Paul teaches that God works through our suffering to shape our Christian character and to lead us to cling to Christ’s gracious promises.

\*Mark 8:31-38 – Jesus teaches of the absolute necessity of the cross, both his and ours.

### **HYMNS**

Opening	694 Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken
HOD	817 Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart
Third/Distr	844 What God Ordains Is Always Good
Closing	867 Afflicted Saint, to Christ Draw Near

### **SERVICE OPTIONS**

867 was recommended on the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, just a few weeks ago. It is recommended to be sung again now. Not only does it fit perfectly thematically, but also the repetition of a newer hymn will help encourage familiarity.



Third Sunday in Lent

March 3, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING THE WORTH OF WORSHIP**

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### **EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

Person A never attends worship. He can't see the point. Person B attends every week out of a slavish sense of obligation. Her mind wanders during the services, for she views the activities of worship merely as tasks for her to complete. Who is worse off? Rather than debating the point, let us just admit neither understand the true worth of worship. And that is exactly what Satan wants.

Many think worship is about what we do for God. It is the other way around. As we gather around Word and sacrament, the Spirit moves us to love and trust in God above all things. Moved by the cross of Christ, we bow down before our God. We commune with him. And that's exactly what God wants.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 20:1-17 – The Ten Commandments teach us that God is to be worshiped above all. Why? He is the God who brought us out of slavery.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 – Whatever it is you trust most, that is what you truly worship. Some worship intelligence. Others worship power. May we worship Christ for what he did on the cross.

\*John 2:13-22 – Jesus restores his Father's house to what it was supposed to be: a place of worship for all people.

### **HYMNS**

Opening	912 Open, Lovely Doors
HOD	558 Salvation unto Us Has Come
Third/Distr	637 The Law of God is Good and Wise
Closing	407 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

### **SERVICE OPTIONS**

912 is a new translation of an older hymn. However, the tune is very familiar.



Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 10, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING THE SOLUTION TO SIN**

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### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

While not every religion uses the word “sin,” they all embrace the concept. Every religion acknowledges that mankind’s flawed attitudes or misguided actions are a source of pain, both now and potentially in eternity. So, every religion offers a solution: a set of laws, a moral code, a path to more enlightened behavior. What do they have in common? We are to solve sin through human effort. *Be better! Try harder!* This is the heart of every false religion. Those who correctly understand they will never overcome their sin are crushed by guilt. Those who ludicrously believe they have defeated their sin are killed by pride.

True religion offers a better way—one that frees us from guilt and has no room for pride. Jesus teaches that the solution to our sin is not to work harder. It is to trust in the work he has done for us. Salvation comes through Spirit-wrought faith in Christ.

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

\*Numbers 21:4-9 – The LORD promised a solution for the bite of venomous snakes. That solution perhaps seemed nonsensical. Yet, all those who trusted God’s promise lived.

Ephesians 2:1-10 – God’s solution to sin is offered by grace and received through faith.

John 3:14-21 – Christ is the solution to sin. Whoever believes in Christ shall not perish but have eternal life.

### HYMNS

Opening	409 Jesus, Refuge of the Weary
HOD	570 God Loved the World So That He Gave
Third/Distr	822 Pass Me Not
Closing	519 There Is a Redeemer

### SERVICE OPTIONS

If 822 is new, consider having a cantor sing verses 1, 2 and the refrain, with the congregation joining in on verses 3, 4 and the final refrain. You could repeat this hymn in subsequent weeks to help teach it.



Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 17, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING DEVOTED COMMITMENT**

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### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

Religious sociologists sometimes divide Christians into two groups: committed Christians and cultural Christians. The former are usually defined as those who are active in a congregation, who pray regularly, who read Scripture, etc. The latter are those individuals who call themselves Christian and perhaps have some Christian beliefs. Yet, they do not strive to live a Christian life. They are not interested in church involvement.

Those definitions are interesting when trying to understand shifts in American Christianity. However, they demonstrate a false assumption about the Christian religion. There is indeed a devoted commitment at the center of Christianity, but it is not man's commitment to God. Even believers will at times demonstrate lukewarm commitment at best. Instead, at the heart of Christianity we find God's devotion and commitment to us. It is a devoted commitment so strong that it put God on the cross.

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 43:1-7 – In devoted commitment the LORD promises his people that even if they need to pass through raging waters or walk through a wall of fire, he will be right there with them.

Hebrews 5:7-9 – Because he was truly human Jesus did not relish having to suffer for our salvation. Yet he submitted to the cross out of his devoted commitment to us.

\*John 12:20-33 – Though the thought of the cross troubled his soul, Jesus was committed to glorifying his Father's name by winning eternal life for us.

### HYMNS

Opening	419 Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle
HOD	571 O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth
Third/Distr	808 Drawn to the Cross
Closing	813 He Will Hold Me Fast

### SERVICE OPTIONS

571 is perhaps an unfamiliar tune to many. Consider using a cantor or choir on verse 1, and maybe verse 2 as well.



**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING REAL STRENGTH**

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**RECOMMENDATION: Observe the Sunday of the Passion.**

The theme for this day, Rethinking Real Strength, can be used either for Palm Sunday or for the Sunday of the Passion. The promotional text works either way. If the worship planner chooses to observe a normal Palm Sunday service with three readings, introductions for three readings are provided below.

However, the CW21 lectionary provides another option. It has reintroduced the 500-year-old practice of appointing the account of Jesus' Triumphal Entry as the Gospel reading for Advent 1. Why? It is not just because of tradition. Palm Sunday serves as a microcosm of the salvation story that unfolds during the Festival Half of the Church Year. We see the King of kings humbling himself and willingly riding to his death. Everything else—the angelic choir of Christmas Eve, the voice of the Father thundering at Christ's baptism, the signs and wonders, Christ's bold preaching, his Transfiguration—leads to this week. Reading the Palm Sunday account on Advent 1 reminds us where the path of the Church Year ends. This is why so many Advent hymns contain Palm Sunday references.

This shift in Advent 1 subsequently allows for the focus of the sixth week of Lent to be broadened into the Sunday of the Passion. The portions of the Gospels that tell of Jesus' suffering and death are typically read during midweek Lenten services. But if many in your congregation do not attend those, it is possible they never hear the passion story in its entirety. The Sunday of the Passion places the entire passion story in front of God's people in one service.

A possible pattern for worship this sixth Sunday in Lent:

- A procession of palms.
- Confession and absolution.
- The Palm Sunday Gospel (Mark 11:1-10).
- A hymn or psalm is sung.
- The Gospel of St. Mark, chapters 14 and 15. It could be read responsively with the congregation. The reading could also be broken into sections, with hymn verses sung in between.
- A sermon could be prior to the passion reading or at the conclusion. However, some congregations choose to simply let the passion story serve as the message.

This practice would mean worshipers would hear the whole account of Holy Week annually, in the voice of the evangelist for that year.

This also allows for the five midweek services after Ash Wednesday to be utilized differently. Instead of reviewing the passion story, they might be used to review a part of the Catechism.

**EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY**

Most religions believe in a powerful God. It is assumed that God will use that strength for the benefit of his followers. That is a reasonable assumption, but it begs the question. What is real strength? It is easy to assume that real strength means exerting your will over another by using any means necessary, including force. But this week we see Jesus Christ demonstrate a different kind of strength.

We have come to Holy Week. It begins with Jesus humbly riding a donkey colt straight into the hands of his enemies. As the week progresses, it will appear that Christ's adversaries are the ones in a position of



power and Jesus is in a position of weakness. Yet what Christ does this holy week—setting his divine strength aside, being passive in the face of death—would change the world. To do what Christ did for us and our salvation took real strength.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS for the Sunday of the Passion**

If the entire passion reading is read in one continuous reading, it could be introduced simply by saying, “The passion of our Lord, according to the Gospel of St. Mark.” If it is broken up into sections, that sentence could be spoken prior to the first reading. Subsequent readings would not be introduced at all.

### **READING INTRODUCTIONS for Palm Sunday** *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Zechariah 9:9-12 – The prophet Zechariah foretold a king who is both infinitely strong and perfectly humble. He would enter Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey.

\*Hebrews 12:1-3 – Jesus demonstrated strength by enduring the cross. He did so for the joy set before him: redeeming us from our sin.

Mark 11:1-10 – The almighty Son of God demonstrates real strength by humbly riding into Jerusalem knowing he will soon be put to death.

### **HYMNS**

Processional	412 All Glory, Laud, and Honor - v1,3,4
Hymn	542 To My Precious Lord - v1,2
Hymn	406 In the Hour of Trial - v1-3
Hymn	429 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded - v2,4,5
Hymn	414 No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet - v1,3,4
Hymn	432 O Dearest Jesus, What Law Have You Broken - v3-6

### **SERVICE OPTIONS**

This worship plan assumes the passion history was still read in mid-week services. Our experience is that for those who attended midweek Lent (generally a smaller section of the congregation), they do not mind hearing the story again. *Service Builder* lays out options. Consider this flow: no opening hymn; the invocation and a brief introduction; the reading of Mark 11:1-10, with the congregation speaking 9b and 10; Hymn 412 (which could be a processional hymn); prayer of the day; the readings and corresponding hymn responses; holy communion using any setting; closing hymn. This worship plan assumes most of the readings will have no introduction. However, a sermonette could be inserted before any reading (sort of like an extended introduction). If the pastor is planning on preaching on the Gospel reading on Good Friday, perhaps the final reading for this day should not serve as the basis of the sermonette.



Holy Thursday March 28, 2024

**RETHINKING RELIGION**

**RETHINKING OUR APPETITES**

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### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

We use the word “appetite” to describe a powerful desire for something. So, what is it you crave the most? Where does your mind go in those quiet moments? What do you want? Power? What do you dream about? Prestige? For what do you hunger? Pleasure? Are our appetites healthy?

A truly healthy appetite is one that aligns with our deepest needs: forgiveness, salvation, communion with God, loving relationships with others. The believer is ravenous for such things! And all of those blessings are on the menu of the Lord’s Supper. Some view Holy Communion as just a religious ritual. Far from it! In this meal, Christ satisfies our greatest appetites.

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Exodus 12:21-30 – Pharaoh hungered for slave labor for Egypt. Israel was starving for salvation. The LORD satisfied that hunger through the Passover meal.

\*1 Corinthians 10:16,17 – We thirst for loving fellowship with God one another. That thirst is quenched in the cup of thanksgiving.

Mark 14:12-26 – Judas’ appetite for money would lead him to betray Jesus. Jesus hungered for our salvation. So, on this night, he instituted the Lord’s Supper.

### HYMNS

Opening	416 When You Woke That Thursday Morning
HOD	659 Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Savior
Third/Distr	662 Draw Near
Closing	930 Go, My Children, with My Blessing - v2,3

### SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a Holy Thursday Confessional Rite that replaces the confession of sins and Kyrie. (The Gloria is traditionally omitted in Lent.) If one desires to add singing to the rite, you could insert 673, v1 ("O Lord, We Praise You") after the responsive dialogue. Every verse contains the cry of the Kyrie, so it is a fine liturgical insertion.

*Service Builder* also allows one to insert the Stripping of the Altar after or in place of the closing hymn. If this is done, a written explanation of the symbolism (in the worship folder or bulletin) would be helpful.



Good Friday

March 29, 2024

*RETHINKING RELIGION*

**RETHINKING SACRIFICE**

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### EXPLANATION OF THE THEME OF THE DAY

In most religions the gods demand sacrifice. Followers are to surrender something of value to that god. Money. Time. Possessions. Some religions have even called for human sacrifice. Even people who think they aren't religious sacrifice to false gods. Take the man whose idol is success. What he wants most is to rise through the ranks at work. So, to pursue that idol, he sacrifices his family, spending little time with them. Throughout human history, false gods have expected you to die for them.

In Christianity you meet a God willing to die for you. Today we see that the true God does not make our relationship with him conditional on how much we sacrifice for him. Instead, we are at peace with God because he sacrificed himself for us. It is one reason why we call it "Good Friday."

### READING INTRODUCTIONS *(to be printed in the worship folder and/or read prior to the reading)*

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 – It was the LORD's will to sacrifice his servant so that we might be justified.

Hebrews 7:26-28 – Jesus is a superior high-priest, for he offered a vastly superior sacrifice.

John 19:17-30 – Jesus is sacrificed on the cross.

### HYMNS

Opening	430 Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted
HOD	422 A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth
Third/Distr	538 Jesus, My Great High Priest
Closing	423 The Power of the Cross

### SERVICE OPTIONS

*Service Builder* contains a special order - "Good Friday: Service of Remembrance of the Cross" - that is extremely adaptable. Another option is to use the rite of Corporate Confession and Absolution, perhaps including a penitential hymn after the responsive reading.