**Lent Resources for Home**

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40 days that lead up to Easter. It is a season of preparation. We are preparing ourselves, and our community, to receive the mystery of Easter: Jesus’ rising from death. There are lots of ways to prepare. Some people prepare by giving things up; others prepare by doing something new and different for the 40 days. Whatever you choose to do, the reason we do it is to feel closer to God and to God’s infinite love.

As we begin Lent this year, we are also approaching the one-year anniversary of the pandemic and social distancing. This Lent there may be a lot of grief that needs to get processed before the promise of new Easter light can enter our hearts. There also may be surprising moments of hope this Lent.

I pray that God’s Spirit be poured out upon your household this Lent. That you may be led during this season in ways that deepen the love you share for one another, and lead you to give that love away to your neighborhood, the community of Davis, and beyond. Amen.

Rev. Alex+

**Making Prayer Beads**

Prayer beads are a simple prayer tool that can help children (and adults) pray by giving our hands something to do. Having something to fidget with, to touch and feel, to count or handle can help our very distracted brains calm down and focus. Over time and with repeated use, the individual beads themselves become imbued with the prayers of our heart.

Materials needed:

-beads (a variety of colors and shapes are nice),

-Thread/fishing line/yarn that you can thread the beads through.

Instructions:

-Gather as a family and invite everyone to make their own prayer beads.

-Prayer beads can be as long or as short as you like. They can be the size to go on your wrist like a bracelet…or they can be very long. Whatever you and your children decide.

-Invite people to choose whatever beads are most appealing to them.

-As you are selecting beads and threading them, here are some things you could talk about:

 “how do you think these beads could help you/us to pray?”

 “what are times in our day when we could use our prayer beads?”

 “What prayers do we want to say right now as we make these?”

-If you or your child are unsure of how you use prayer beads here are some options:

-Some people simply feel and touch each bead, one at a time, while they pray. They aren’t too focused on the beads themselves; the beads simply are a tactile sensation that calms the mind and aids focus (like a fidget spinner…but for prayer).

-Some people make a pattern in their beads, like 3 blue beads and then one green bead…all the way around. Then they pray one prayer on the blue beads, and they pray a different kind of prayer on the green beads.

-When you have strung all your beads, simply tie it together into a loop. You’re done!

**Making a Giving Box**

A traditional Lenten practice is “almsgiving” – the practice of taking care of our neighbors who do not have enough. Especially in this time of COVID it is important to practice paying attention to the needs of our neighbors and finding ways to reach out and care for them. The idea here is for your kids to make a giving box…a special box that you’ll place in a prominent place in your house during Lent. Decide ahead of time on what favorite local charity group you would like to support, and do some research on what supplies that organization are in most need of. If it’s a food pantry, collect canned foods. If it’s an organization for children, gather toys and clothes. The key to this will be to decide on a realistic, achievable, regular schedule. One item a week till Easter? One item a day?

Materials needed:

-Cardboard box (**variation:** instead of using a cardboard box and decorating it…you could also make the activity about creating the box from materials around the house)

-Art supplies (markers, paint, glitter, whatever you’re willing and excited about using)

Instructions:

-Explain that Jesus taught us to love our neighbor as ourselves. And that there are people in our community who do not have homes and do not have food (or whatever may be most relevant to the charity you chose).

-Invite the whole family to participate in a practice this Lent of gathering things for these neighbors in need.

-Introduce the giving box…explain that you will have it in a prominent part of the house, and everyone will contribute in some way.

-Invite everyone to use art supplies to decorate the box however you like. Or everyone to help in building a make shift box.

-Then follow through on the giving schedule and check in with each other about it periodically.

**Making a Lent “Calendar”**

If your family, or family members, are giving something up for lent (like chocolate, or less screen time, etc.) or taking something on (more time with family, spending 10 minutes in prayer every day) for the 40 days of the Lent then having some way to mark the passage of time can be helpful. And for it to visually show you how big of a commitment you have made or have achieved is just bonus points! This is a way to do just that. You will either make or a dismantle a long chain of 40 paper links to mark the passage of the 40 days.

Materials needed:

-Strips of paper

-Glue

Instructions:

-Explain that Lent is the 40 days that leads up to Easter. And like Jesus in the wilderness for 40 days, we too practice giving up things and taking on new things that help us grow closer to God. Have everyone share and remember what they are giving up or taking on this Lent.

-Then talk about how having either a count down or a count up to Easter can help the whole family remember this commitment and follow through.

-You will then use these strips of paper to either make a long chain of 40 paper links which you will take one off each day. Or will you build this chain over the next 40 days, adding a new link each day? Your family can choose either or.

-You can also add something in each link. This works particularly well if you are building it one link a day up to 40. Each day you can write what was hard or enjoyable about that day. At the end you will have a record of the highs and lows of the past 40 days.

-If by any chance someone accidentally or intentionally breaks their 40-day practice early…it’s not a big deal. Use that as an opportunity to practice forgiveness of self and trusting in God’s infinite forgiveness. You can still keep doing the rings as a countdown to Easter.

**COVID Anniversary Grief Ritual**

You may consider having some sort of ritual to help your family process the grief that may be coming up with the arrival of the one-year anniversary. Consider using around March 15th as a good time for that anniversary…that was about when we had our last Godly Play session, the last time we were physically at church together. And I know that schools followed a week or so after that. Pick a date in that two week stretch that would work for your family to gather.

This does not need to be focused on church if that’s not really present…I could imagine with the children the biggest grief will be around school and their friends.

 Begin by gathering everyone, and saying something along these lines:

*It’s now been about a year since there was in-person school, since we have been able to go to church, since we have been able to see family members & friends…*

*Anniversaries such as these often bring up feelings of sadness, anger, confusion, difficulty focusing, being distracted or just minds going blank. These are normal and healthy feelings you and I have been having. What we are going through is very hard, and it causes us all a lot of stress/anger/sadness/confusion/pick your word.*

*We’re going to do an activity as a family to help us name, share, and express these feelings to one another and to God. Sharing how we are feeling with those we love, including God, is really helpful in healing and feeling better.*

Then here are the instructions for the ritual as I (Alex) explain them, but please adapt to your children and their ages.

-Begin by taking a large sheet of paper you can write up. The bigger the better.

-On that sheet of paper, draw a person at the center…this can be a stick figure. Label it “me.”

-Then draw a medium sized circle around the person. This is the person’s 6 ft of social distancing. In terms of the ritual, have enough space that you can write both inside the bubble and outside of it.

-Once this is drawn, begin just popcorn style naming things we are sad, angry, confused, and just have grief about relating to COVID, the pandemic, social distancing.

Those things people are grieving because they can’t go to them…such as school, friends, church, restaurants, etc.…write them outside the bubble.

Those things people are grieving because they can’t get away from them…such as feeling lonely, anxious, depressed, etc.…they would be inside the bubble.

Allow people to name whatever they are grieving/missing/longing for/feel sad or upset about. Crying is okay…including for adults. Getting upset is expected. This is a chance to process and share. Silence is also okay, and is not something to avoid or fill up.

While getting specific isn’t necessary, often sharing something specific will illicit deeper processing of grief. For example, “I miss school.” “what do you miss about school?” “My friends.” “Who do you miss?” “Sarah.”

-Continue for as long as seems appropriate. You might just do this in 10 minutes, no tears or anything, and done. You might do this for a full hour. Whatever might be best for your family.

-When you are done, put the piece of paper away (you can either save it or dispose of it later). Conclude with sharing something you love about the people in the room. Go around, and at minimum share something you are grateful for about one another or about your family in general.

**YouTube Videos**

Finally, some families requested having some videos for Lent and Holy Week that they could view at home on their own time. I have provided a few here:

Jesus’ 40 Days in the Wilderness (the basis for the 40 days of Lent). This is great for all ages:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-6a25Yo2wE>

A Series of videos for Holy Week. This is for a slightly older age group – think like 6 – 12 years old. Please review these, particularly the Good Friday video, before sharing with your children to make sure they are appropriate for where your children are. I did my best to find materials that would work for a wide age group, but alas significant moments in the Holy Week story are unavoidably mature.

Palm Sunday

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAcaa-w5u_E>

Maundy Thursday

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SixzvFIOBYI>

Good Friday

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01NHl7HFSiE>

Easter Sunday

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ9hXPy9vBE>