

FOREWORD

Many Christians and churches observe Lent with special services (Ash Wednesday, midweek, Holy Week) and/or a Sunday worship series. These liturgical experiences often focus in theme or scriptural text on Jesus' cross. The question is, do we simply make Lent fit into liturgical structures that remain unaffected by what looms before Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem? Or does the journey recalled in Lent's movement toward the cross impact and transform worship and its varied components? In other words, how can the cross shed light on what we do in worship and why—not just in this season but in every season?

Worship in Light of the Cross has two underlying purposes as a devotional resource for individuals and communities. First, this book aims to link the Lenten journey before you with worship that is thoroughly grounded in the repercussions of the cross. Second, this book bids you to discover in such cross-formed worship what it means to be a disciple of the Christ we confess not only risen but crucified.

Worship in Light of the Cross will engage those purposes through daily readings that begin on Ash Wednesday and conclude on Easter Sunday. Each reading will reflect on a brief scripture highlighted for that day, followed by a related prayer or spiritual exercise.

Take a closer look at the preceding Contents pages. You will notice that the readings are organized in weeks on the basis of traditional components of corporate worship: Processional, Gathering, Invocation, Confession, Proclamation, Creed,

Response, and Sacrament. Each week opens and closes with readings evoked by narratives that either take place on Good Friday or that directly address the meaning of the cross. The other four readings, drawn from both Old and New Testaments, relate more generally to that week's worship component.

Six readings a week (with the exception of Holy Week) create a weekly sabbath day with no reading. For groups, that would ideally be the day for a group session. The Leader's Guide (page 109) provides suggestions for engaging this book in a group. If you are not part of a group experience, consider this weekly sabbath as an opportunity to review the week's readings and your reflections on them. You may find that the weekly questions and exercises in the Leader's Guide provide the basis for your sabbath review.

Whether you are reading this book as part of a group or as an individual discipline, set aside a time each day when you can prayerfully open yourself to the highlighted scripture, read and reflect on the ensuing reading, and use the closing prayer or spiritual exercise. This book is not intended to be read through in one sitting. Setting a discipline of one reading per day provides an opportunity for deeper engagement with the material and its connection with your own journey through Lent.

This book's orienting the components of worship to the cross has deep roots in Christian tradition. Perhaps the most striking example of this orientation can be seen in the architecture of many of the world's great cathedrals. Beyond all the apparent differences in furnishings and structural flourishes, most cathedrals share a simple foundational "footprint": They are built in the form of a cross. To enter into worship was literally to enter into a cross. Architectural styles may change, but worship remains imprinted by the cross. May this book deepen your exploration of that imprint on your practice of worship and on your walk as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

PROCESSIONAL ASH WEDNESDAY

Pilgrims

Read Psalm 122 and Luke 9:51.

Pilgrim. Hear that word around Thanksgiving, and an initial association may be with folks who landed on Plymouth Rock and celebrated a harvest feast with the first Americans. But what image—what *vocation*—might the word *pilgrim* evoke for you on Ash Wednesday?

Luke tells us that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” The language reveals not only the direction Jesus takes but also the resolve with which he takes it. Beyond that, it is not simply *where* Jesus goes that matters here—it is *when*. He will enter Jerusalem in the week of Passover. Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem is not a solitary act. Jesus joins thousands of pilgrims whose faces are set on observing Passover in Jerusalem. Such a pilgrimage identifies Jesus as a pious observer of centuries-old Jewish traditions. Many of the psalms, including Psalm 122, commemorate the journeys made by Jewish pilgrims to the holy city.

When Jesus makes this pilgrimage, he does so as part of a community bound by sacred memory and shared ritual. For this reason, the opening reading for *Worship in Light of the Cross* centers on the theme of pilgrims and pilgrimage. Like Jesus’ Passover pilgrimage, during this season of Lent, you and I also make a journey bound by sacred memory and shared ritual. Like Jesus, indeed *with* Jesus, we are pilgrims on the road to Jerusalem.

The memories that accompany our journey grow out of Jesus' words and actions on his pilgrimage along with the ritualized traditions of Judaism that shaped Jesus' path. We engage in such remembrance to recall God's saving actions in our lives today. Memory that does not influence contemporary living is ineffectual nostalgia, no matter how fond or familiar the stories of Jesus may strike us.

The shared ritual that marks our journey as persons and communities of faith centers on worship. It matters little where we fall on the spectrums of worship as formal or informal, liturgical or "free-form," traditional or contemporary. It matters greatly, however, whether we allow our worship to be cruciform in shape. Worship that flees from the disruptive possibilities of the cross, whether out of naïve triumphalism or a fear of alienating people we'd like to fill our pews or subscribe our budgets, is empty ritual.

So on this day of ashes, set your face with Jesus toward Jerusalem and claim your vocation as pilgrim.

As I journey on this path, O God, open my understandings and practices of worship to the transformative possibilities of cross-formed faith. In Jesus Christ. Amen