Week 1

Number of candles lit prior to service: 6

Introduction:

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord's passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God’s mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Scripture reading: Matthew 4.-11

Reflection:

We extinguish the first candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember Jesus’ lonely trial in the desert. This account reveals how similar and different we are from Jesus. We face temptations as well, but we know we are not always faithful like Jesus. Where Jesus refuses the devil, we surrender. We do not always trust God's provision. We put the Lord our God to the test. We worship and serve other gods.

The devil tempts Jesus to abandon his mission to save the world. Consider how you also face temptations to abandon the mission God has given you. How have you been tempted to trust in your own ability to meet your needs rather than God's provision? How have you been tempted to seek greatness and renown for yourself rather than God's glory? How have you been tempted to worship false gods and empty idols rather than to worship and serve God only?

Prayer:

Pray with me. Holy God, you know how we face temptations every day to ignore you and abandon the mission you have given us. During this season of Lent, we ask that you would purify our hearts and minds. Help us to grow in love for you. Make our commitment to your mission even deeper. Protect us when we are tempted. Root us in your Scripture so we might fight the devil with your truth. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.
Week 2

Number of candles lit prior to service: 5

Introduction:

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord’s passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God’s mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Scripture reading: Matthew 9.9-13

Reflection:

We extinguish the second candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember the Pharisees rejecting the community Jesus creates. We are more like the Pharisees than we want to admit. We also create barriers to keep people who are different than us from being a part of our community. We judge their sins while ignoring our own. We think we deserve God’s love but want God to condemn them. We separate ourselves from them to avoid being associated with them.

Where is Jesus in this scene? He sits with Matthew, the tax collector, and Matthew’s friends. The larger society rejected them as bad, unclean, unworthy sinners. But Jesus eats with them, essentially saying, “These are my people.” Where are the Pharisees? On the outside, unwilling to join Jesus because he associates with the “wrong people.” Who are the “wrong people” in your mind? How do your prejudices keep you from being in community with others?

Prayer:

Pray with me. Jesus, the community you create challenges us. We confess we can be like the Pharisees—on the outside, refusing to participate in the community you have in mind. Reveal to us our prejudices. Forgive us for rejecting the very people you came to save. Forgive us for desiring a so-called safe community full of people who look like us, think like us, make as much money as us, and vote like us, instead of the real, beautiful, and diverse Church you came to establish. We no longer want to exclude others. We want to embrace them as you embraced us. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.
Week 3

Number of candles lit prior to service: 4

Introduction:

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord’s passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God’s mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Scripture reading: Luke 18.35-43

Reflection:

We extinguish the third candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember the people who rebuke the blind beggar and seek to prevent Jesus from healing him. Jesus announced earlier that his mission included the “recovery of sight to the blind.” The people close to Jesus, his disciples, were supposed to participate in his mission. They should bring the blind beggar to him. Instead the people close to Jesus try to silence the blind man who desperately needs his help.

We don’t know the disciples’ motivation in this account, but we know we can be just like them. How have you ignored those who are most hurting? How have you neglected your mission to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God? When have you refused to bring your neighbors to Jesus? Thankfully, Jesus won’t be stopped. He will reach out and bring healing despite our neglect and refusals. Who in your life needs to know Jesus’ grace and healing? How might you bring them to meet Jesus?

Prayer:

Pray with me. Holy Spirit, we believe you are on the move, bringing health and wholeness to a hurting world. We know that you call us to reach out to others as well, but sometimes we refuse. We refuse to see those who need you. We refuse to slow down in the midst of our busy lives. We refuse to minister to those who hurt. Forgive us, Lord. We thank you that you won’t be stopped. You will heal and save no matter what. Help us remember how you sought us out. Thank you for the people you used to bring us to you. Please help us to be more faithful to the mission you gave us. Give us compassion and boldness. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.
Week 4

Number of candles lit prior to service: 3

Introduction:

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord's passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God's mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Scripture reading: Luke 4.16-30

Reflection:

We extinguish the fourth candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember the people in the synagogue who reject Jesus as God’s messenger. These people, filled with hatred and fear refuse the good news of grace and forgiveness. Here Jesus tells us what God cares about: freedom and justice for those hurting in the world. Because this mission doesn’t fit their vision of what God should care about, the people refuse to believe Jesus could be God’s messiah.

Consider the ways we also reject Jesus. We may reject him because we know his good news for the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed means we would have to care for these people as well and that would be uncomfortable. We may reject him because we want to be in control. We want Jesus to submit to our plans and desires. Instead, Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow him. This offends us. Maybe we want to throw him off the cliff. Or maybe we simply ignore him and refuse to obey. But let us remember, by rejecting Jesus and what he cares about, we reject God.

Prayer:

Pray with me. Holy God, we confess that we want to be in control of you. We want you to follow our agenda. We don’t want to listen to Jesus. We want better food on our table, but are not concerned with those who don’t have enough food on theirs. We want a promotion at work, but are not concerned that others cannot find employment to provide for their families. We want our kids to get into the best colleges, but don’t care that others are dropping out of high school. We don’t like you disrupting our priorities by telling us we need to bring good news to the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. Change us, Jesus. Help us to care for the people you care about. Break our hearts for the things that break yours. Help us to listen and obey. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.
**Week 5**

*Number of candles lit prior to service: 2*

**Introduction:**

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord’s passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God’s mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

*Scripture reading: Mark 10.35-45*

**Reflection:**

We extinguish the fifth candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember the disciples’ selfish desire for power and fame. John and James want to be greater than the other disciples. They want authority over others. Prominence. Recognition. This kind of ambition, which is so valued in the world, has no place in the Kingdom of God. Jesus challenges the disciples, reminding them that to drink his cup and undergo his baptism is the way of the cross. Humility comes before glory. To become great, one must be a servant. Serving others is at the core of Jesus’ mission to give his life as a ransom for ours.

Consider how mutual service builds community, but ambition and pride destroy it. Consider your role in your congregation. Are you like James and John, wanting recognition and power? Do you seek to serve your sisters and brothers here, or do you think this church’s role is just to meet your needs?

**Prayer:**

Pray with me. Jesus, we live in a world scratching and clawing for more authority and recognition. We confess we are tempted by the false promises of ambition. We have let those lies seep into our life together in this community. We confess we want the opposite of your mission. We don’t want the cross. We want to be served rather than to serve. Change us, Jesus. Help us to find the joy in serving one another. May we be a community that looks different than the rest of the world. Instead of being marked by ambition and jealousy, may we be known as a community that loves and serves sacrificially. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.


Week 6

Number of candles lit prior to service: 1

Introduction:

During the forty days of Lent the Christian Church prepares to observe the Lord’s passion and resurrection. We examine ourselves as we remember the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. In this season of repentance and fasting, we come to terms with our mortality and need for God’s mercy. The candles on this cross represent Jesus’ life and ministry. Each week we extinguish another candle, remembering how we, the human race, rejected Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Scripture reading: John 13.21-30

Reflection:

We extinguish the final candle (EXTINGUISH CANDLE), as we remember Judas’ betrayal of Jesus Christ. Lent is a hard season. We have examined our consciences and looked at the hard truths of our sin. We may want to rush to forgiveness, but stay here with the hardest part of the story. Remember, we cannot celebrate the glorious new life of the resurrection on Easter without going through Jesus’ unjust crucifixion.

Just a few days after entering Jerusalem and receiving the praise of the crowds, Jesus’ closest friends betray and deny him, the authorities arrest him on false charges, and the crowds call for his execution. We may like to think we would not deny Jesus as Peter does or betray him as Judas does, but the reality is that the same darkness exists in us. It is not just Judas’s sin of betrayal that sends Jesus to the cross—it is our sin as well. Consider the areas of your life where sin still has a foothold. Think of the dark recesses of your mind and soul that you hide from others. Know that Jesus died so that you might live in the light and be free.

Prayer:

Pray with me. Jesus we are grieved. The fact that Judas betrayed you still shocks us. How could such an injustice happen? But know we could have just as easily been in Judas’s place. Forgive us for the ways we betray you. We worship idols of money, safety, health. We refuse to love our neighbor. Thank you for this season of Lent in which you have guided us to see our sin for what it really is. You have led us to see the darkness in our lives we try to hide from you, from others, and even from ourselves. Thank you that you love us when we are at our worst. Transform us into a people who love you with all that we have and who love our neighbors as ourselves. Give us the grace to repent so we might seek first your good, true, and peaceful kingdom. Amen.