PREACHING & TEACHING

Lent Sermon Series

A six-week Lent series built on subtraction rather than addition, walking the wilderness, the three temptations, and the turn towards Jerusalem. Written for congregations who give something up every year without ever being told why, and for preachers who find Lent harder to sell than Advent.

6 weeks · 6 segments

Six weeks, each with a text, a claim and the thing that makes it uncomfortable. Ash Wednesday notes at the end.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Lent is a harder sell than Advent because it offers nothing pleasant. Do not solve that by making it pleasant. Congregations can carry six weeks of seriousness if you tell them at the start that is what it is.
- If you publish these as episodes, release week one in the last week of January. Lent searches start well before Ash Wednesday.
- Give up something yourself and say so once, in week one, without making it the point. A preacher who preaches fasting and is visibly not fasting is the fastest way to empty a Lent series.

01. Week one: the wilderness

22 min

[the Spirit drives him there - do not soften that verb]

Text: Mark 1:12-13. Four lines and almost no detail, which is the opportunity.

The claim: the wilderness is not a punishment or a detour. Mark says the Spirit drove him out there, immediately after the voice at the baptism said this is my beloved Son. The affirmation and the desert are consecutive.

The discomfort: this means some hard seasons are not evidence that something went wrong.

02. Week two: bread

22 min

[the first temptation is the reasonable one]

Text: Matthew 4:1-4. The claim: the first temptation is not to do evil, it is to meet a genuine need by the shortest route. He is actually hungry. The bread would not have hurt anybody.

The discomfort: most of what deforms a life is not wickedness, it is legitimate hunger satisfied too quickly.

03. Week three: the temple

22 min

[the temptation to be visibly vindicated]

Text: Matthew 4:5-7. The claim: the second temptation is to force a public proof. Throw yourself down and be caught in front of everyone, and the question of who you are is settled at a stroke.

The discomfort: the devil quotes scripture correctly here. Being right about the text is not the same as being right.

04. Week four: the kingdoms

22 min

[the shortcut to the actual goal]

Text: Matthew 4:8-11. The claim: he is offered exactly what he came for. All the kingdoms. The destination is not in dispute, only the road.

The discomfort: a church can want entirely the right outcome and take a road that costs it the thing it was for.

05. Week five: setting his face

22 min

[the pivot of the gospel]

Text: Luke 9:51. He set his face to go to Jerusalem. Everything in Luke after this verse is a journey towards a death he has already described.

The claim: this is chosen, in advance, with full information. Not endured, not stumbled into.

06. Week six: the last week begins

22 min

[hand into Palm Sunday - do not resolve it]

End the series unresolved, on the edge of the last week, and let Palm Sunday pick it up. A Lent series that reaches Easter early has spent the thing it was saving.

[Ash Wednesday note: if you hold a service, keep it to twelve minutes, one text, and the imposition. It is the one service of the year where less preaching is obviously right.]

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