**Lent and Easter: Creating Sacred Moments**

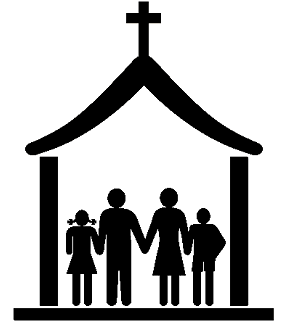
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Lent is the season of the church, set apart, to create a time of prayer and reflection to prepare our selves to appreciate and celebrate the greatest event of Christianity; the resurrection of Christ. For children, the theology about Christ dying for our sins is much too complex and images of the crucifixion can be disturbing. That being said, children can learn the Easter story, including the crucifixion (without graphic detail) and that the resurrection proves that God’s love is forever and cannot and will never desert us. God’s love is so great, that nothing, not even abandoning or killing Jesus on the cross could stop God from loving us!

As we plan for Lent and Easter, it might be helpful to look at it in relationship to the U-shape of spiritual formation:

* Lent begins with Ash Wednesday (gray heart) and then there are five Sundays (purple hearts) that take us deeper into the depth of the love of Easter.
* Palm/Passion Sunday (question mark) is day when we symbolically wonder if the love was killed.
* Easter (large white heart) is the deepest part of the entire U… the deepest part and also the deepest love of God ever revealed to us.
* Easter then lasts 50 days (white hearts)… it takes 50 days to soak in and celebrate that kind of DEEP LOVE!
* And we, as the Church/Body of Christ, continue to “be” Christ’s love in the world. Pentecost (the church) is the day the Holy Spirit came and empowered us to become the love for the world. The Pentecost is the sending forth or the arrow on the U where we, who are transformed, share the light with the world.

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**The Sacred Moment**

The sacred moment, used each week during the weeks of Lent, on Easter Sunday and throughout the fifty days of Easter, will help our children ponder, reflect, appreciate and experience the deep, deep love of God.

**What is a Sacred Moment?**

The sacred moment is a time set apart during our time with children when we intentionally create sacred space for them to be still, ponder about and experience God’s presence. It can last for five seconds and it can be ten minutes. It is not the length that matters as much as providing time to truly focus in on God.

It works like a pair of binoculars. When we look at a field of flowers through binoculars, we can focus broadly and see the entire field. Or we can focus in on one flower and look in depth at its beauty.

The sacred moment helps the children move from the business of the morning and focus on the holiness of God.

**Examples of the Use of Sacred Moments during Lent and Easter**

I have 2 detailed scripts here and then more ideas at the end that you can flesh out. Do not feel tied to my words. Feel free to morph and change them to fit your style, personality and time available.

**Idea #1: THE LENTEN CANDLE**

Supplies: A purple candle and holder, a white candle of the same size, matches, and black cloth large enough to cover the candle.

**Each week during Lent:** *(You can begin on Ash Wednesday if you have an event for them, or on the first Sunday of Lent following Ash Wednesday).*

1) Show the children the purple Lenten Candle.

2) Explain briefly to them that purple is the color of Lent.

Say: We spend the six weeks of Lent preparing spiritually for Easter because Easter is the holiest day of the year… the day Jesus rose from the grave and proved, once and for all, that God loves us so much and, nothing we can EVER do will stop God from loving us! Easter is a celebration of God’s amazing love!!

3) Show them the purple Candle of Lent.

4) Light the purple Lenten candle and invite the children to sit silently for a time of pondering the great love of God. Invite them to try and feel God’s loving presence. (Begin with 5 seconds of silence and each week add five more seconds so that by Easter they can sit in contemplation for about 30 seconds.)

5) Say: Lent is a time to ponder God’s great love as we prepare to celebrate Easter.

6) Have them all blow out the candle together.

7) Take a few moments and ask the children to share what they experienced in the prayer time.

Light the Lenten Candle and contemplate the love God each week of Lent and then:

**Palm/Passion Sunday:**

1) Light the Candle of Lent and sit in contemplation as usual. They will be able to sit for 25 seconds or more by now.

2) Say: God sent Jesus to show us God’s love. Some people knew that Jesus was the love of God on earth, but some people did not understand. They were afraid of his love and they did not understand that he was sent by God to teach us to love one another as God loves us. So, I am sorry to tell you this sad part of the story, but I have to. (Pause). Do you know what those people did? The ones that did not know who Jesus was? They killed him by hanging him on a cross. They tried to kill God’s love.

3) Blow out the candle and place a black cloth over the candle.

4) They thought they had killed God’s love and would never have to think about it again.

5) Invite the children to sit in silence for about 15 seconds.

6) Say: Today is called Palm/Passion Sunday. Today we remember that Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem by people who loved him, they loved him so much that they waved palm branches for him.

7) Say: But today is also called Passion Sunday because this week is the week we remember that Jesus was killed, died and was laid in the tomb. They tried to kill God’s love.

(Depending on the age of children, you might have to remind them that Easter is coming so they don’t leave upset).

**Easter Sunday:**

During the week between Palm Sunday and Easter, remove the purple Lenten candle and replace it with a similar sized white candle. Place the black over the white candle.

1) Say: We have spent the past six weeks contemplating the great love of God! We have thought about how amazing it is that God’s love will never leave us. There is nothing we can do to make God stop loving us. But, do you remember what happened? Some people did not understand that Jesus was the son of God and they did not understand his love and so they killed him by hanging him on the cross. And that is why we have this black cloth over our Lenten candle. These people tried to kill God’s love.

2) Say: But guess what, nothing can kill God’s love! Nothing can ever make God stop loving us, not even hanging Jesus on the cross. And so I am going to remove the black cloth and we will light out Lenten Candle again!

3) Pull off the cloth and pretend to be amazed.

4) Say: Where is the purple Lenten Candle? (Let them guess).

5) The Lenten candle is gone and our white Easter Candle is here! We have spent the season of Lent contemplating God’s great love and today, Easter, is the day that Jesus rose from the dead, the day he resurrected, and on this special day he proved to us that nothing can ever stop God from loving us…not even killing God’s son!! NOTHING can EVER stop God from loving you. And that is the message of Easter! This is our Easter Candle and we will light it as a celebration that God loves us so much!!

6) Light the candle and let the children cheer! And you all blow it out together and say: Happy Easter!!!!

**The Fifty Days of Easter:**

Each week, say: Easter, the celebration of God’s amazing love for us… the amazing love that will never ever leave us… the love that will always surround us… is so important, that we get to celebrate it for 50 days! I mean, your birthday is a very important day, and you get one of those a year. Valentines Day is very special, and there is only one Valentines day. Thanksgiving is super important and we only get to celebrate it for one day. But Easter is so important, that we get to celebrate it for 50 days every year!

2) Say: I am going to light the White Easter Candle and when I do I want you to celebrate by clapping your hands.

3) Light the candle and celebrate by clapping their hands. (Each week have them do something new as a celebration… stomp their feet, jump up and down, sing opera, pop party poppers, throw streamers, etc.

4) Say: Easter is a celebration… a celebration of God’s great love!

5) Now let’s blow out the candle (this will help them settle because they will want to blow out the candle… so give them a moment).

6) Oh wait, before we blow out the Easter Candle, let’s be still and just feel God’s love! (Be still for about 15 seconds each week).

7) Ask them if they felt anything and what they felt.

8) Blow out the candle all together and say sincerely: Happy Easter! God’s love will never leave you. God will always love you!

\*\*Special Note: Kim Meyers suggested giving each child a purple candle to light at home during Lent and then on Easter Sunday, give them a white one to burn at home during Easter. Thanks, Kim!

**Idea #2: COUNTING THE DAYS**

Supplies you will need: Nothing

Each week during Lent: *(You can begin on Ash Wednesday if you have an event for them, or on the first Sunday of lent following Ash Wednesday).*

1) Say: Lent is a special time where we spend time preparing for Easter. Easter is the day when God proved through the resurrection of Jesus just how deep and everlasting God’s love is. On Easter God showed us that God will always love us. We cannot do anything to make God stop loving us!

2) Say: Each Sunday of Lent we will spend time in silence contemplating, thinking about how much God loves us and trying to feel God’s love surrounding us. To get ready for this, and since Lent is forty days, we will begin by reaching way up. This (stretch up) is forty! Now let’s begin with forty and count backward to 0.

3) Begin counting backwards and, as you do, slowly model moving closer and closer to the floor and at the same time, speak softer and softer. By the time you are on 0, be seated and the last few numbers will be whispered.

4) In a whisper, say: Let us pray silently and try to feel God’s love surrounding us. (Begin with 5 seconds of silence and each week add five more seconds so that by Easter they can sit in contemplation for about 30 seconds.)

5) At the end of the time congratulate them for being silent and invite them share what they felt.

Do this each week until:

**Palm/Passion Sunday**

1) Do the counting call to prayer and contemplative time.

2) Say: But today we have to add one more time of counting. God sent Jesus to show us God’s love. And some people understood that Jesus was the love of God on earth, but some people did not understand. They were afraid of his love and they did not understand that he was sent by God to teach us to love one another as God loves us. So, I am sorry to tell you this sad part of the story, but I have to. (Pause). Do you know what those people did? The ones that did not know who Jesus was? They killed him by hanging him on a cross. They tried to kill God’s love.

3) Say: Today is called Palm/Passion Sunday. Today we remember that Jesus was welcomes into Jerusalem by people who loved him, they loved him so much that they waved palm branches for him.

4) Say: But today is also called Passion Sunday because this week is the week we remember that Jesus was killed, died and was laid in the tomb. They tried to kill God’s love. So today, we need to clap seven times more, one for each day between the happiness of Palm Sunday and the sadness of Jesus being killed and placed in the tomb.

5) Let us clap one time (Clap) to remember the happiness of Palm Sunday.

6) And now let’s clap once for:

The last supper Jesus had with his friends (clap)

Jesus was arrested and beaten (clap)

Jesus was taken to the place where they killed him (clap)

Jesus died (clap)

And Jesus was dead and placed in the tomb (clap).

7) Sit in silence about 15 seconds.

8) Say: Today begins the holiest week. The week Jesus was killed. Thank you for sharing this sacred time with me.

(For younger children you might have to remind them that Easter is coming so they won’t be too sad or upset).

**Easter Sunday**

1) Say: We have spent the last forty days and holy week contemplating the great love of God. Let’s begin by counting our forty days of Lent and the week of sadness…

This (stretch up) is forty! Now let’s begin with forty and count backward to 0.

2) Begin counting background as you do, slowly model moving closer and closer to the floor and at the same time, speak softer and softer. By the time you are on 0, be seated and the last few numbers will be whispered.

3) And now let’s clap for the days of Holy Week:

Let us clap one time (Clap) to remember the happiness of Palm Sunday.

The last supper Jesus had with his friends (clap)

Jesus was arrested and beaten (clap)

Jesus was taken to the place where they killed him (clap)

Jesus died (clap)

And Jesus was dead and placed in the tomb (clap).

4) Whisper: But today is Easter! The sad days are over and today we celebrate the love of God. Jesus died on the cross and still God loves us! There is nothing that can ever stop God from loving us! Not even death can stop God from loving us!

5) Let’s count again only this time, let’s count with joy because we have a God that loves us! (Begin counting to fifty and as you do stand up slowly and get louder and louder)!

6) Easter is so special… God’s love is so amazing that we will celebrate Easter for fifty days! I mean, your birthday is a very important day, and you get one of those a year. Valentines Day is very special, and there is only one Valentines day. Thanksgiving is super important and we only get to celebrate it for one day. But Easter is so important, that we get to celebrate it for 50 days every year!

7) Say: Now stand very still, like a statue and see if you can feel God’s amazing love surrounding you. (Stand still for about 15 seconds).

8) Did any of you feel anything? What?

9) Say: Happy Easter… happy fifty days of celebrating God’s love!

**The 50 Days of Easter:**

Repeat the counting and reflection from above.

**Idea #3: A LOVE-FILLED LENT : Thanks to (who gave me this idea… it was one of you??) for this idea:**

Supplies you will need: A bulletin board, hearts for each child for each week of Lent, strings of heart shaped lights.

**Each week during Lent:**

On Ash Wednesday or the first Sunday of Lent, place a heart in the center of the board. Invite the children to spend the season of Lent creating symbolically the great and amazing love of God. Add hearts each week. (You can invite them to decorate a heart each week with pictures or prayers, or have the hearts pre-cut.)

**Palm/ Passion Sunday:**

Add the hearts for the week, tell the story of the death of Jesus and cover the board with a black cloth.

**Easter Sunday:**

*Before Easter Sunday, add glitter, plastic jewels and anything that will make the poster shiny and bright.*

Review the death of Jesus and how the people tried to kill God’s son and kill his love, but they could not! And then tear the cloth off of the board!

**The Fifty Weeks of Easter**

*Hang strings of heart lights all over the room. Light them all at once or light one string the first week and continue to add another string each week of the six weeks of Easter!*

Show the kids the poster and then turn off the light saying, “The love of God will never leave you.” (Turn on the lights). Sit quietly for 30 seconds soaking in the love of God.

**Idea #4: Bells on a Banner**

Supplies you will need: A rope or thick ribbon that can be shaken each week. Six bells that can be hung on the banner or rope. A jingle bell or tiny bell for each child.

**Each week during Lent:**

On Ash Wednesday or the first Sunday of Lent, begin by placing one bell on the ribbon and continue to add a bell each week. Tell the children to hear the beauty of God’s love and gently shake the bell. Then invite them to sit for about 30 seconds and contemplate God’s amazing love. At the end of their prayer time, shake to bell (or bells) one more time.

**Palm/ Passion Sunday:**

By now you will have six bells on the ribbon and shaking it will sound festive and fun. Tell the children about Palm Sunday and shake the bells with joy. Then tell them about the death if Jesus and as you tell it, tape the clapper so that it will not ring. Tell the children the story of the death if Jesus and have them enter a time of prayer… this time ring the bells and let them hear how sad it was that Jesus was killed… the silence will actually “sound” like sadness in contrast to all the weeks of bells ringing.

**Easter Sunday:**

*Before Easter Sunday, remove the tape from the week before on the Lenten bells and have a bell for each child. Pass out the bells and then invite them to celebrate Easter by ringing their bells along with the bells of Lent!*

**The Fifty Weeks of Easter**

Begin each week by reminding the children that Easter is fifty days of celebrating God’s love. Invite them to sit for a few minutes of silence contemplating God’s great love and then shake the bells and let them join in with clapping, snapping their fingers, stomping etc.

\*\* You can have them ring their bells each week and send them home the last day of the fifty days of Easter or give them the bell they ring on Easter to take home and ring!

**Idea #5: RIBBONS ON A TREE:**

Supplies you will need: A tree or branch and purple ribbons for each child each week of Lent and a black cloth to cover the tree with. And something to put in place of the ribbons on Easter such as white ribbon, flowers etc.

**Each week during Lent:**

On Ash Wednesday or the first Sunday of Lent, begin inviting the children to hang a ribbon of love on the tree and as they do to say a prayer that they might understand God’s great love for them that was proven on Easter. Make a big deal, as you move through Lent, that God’s love is showing more and more.

**Palm/ Passion Sunday:**

Add the ribbons and then tell the story of the death of Jesus and how those who did not understand his love tried to kill him and the love of God by hanging him on the cross and killing him. Then cover the tree with the black cloth.

**Easter Sunday:**

*Before Easter Sunday, remove the purple ribbons and replace them with white ribbons and flowers. Make sure you have at least one ribbon for each child tied to the tree.* Review the death of Jesus and how the people tried to kill God’s son and kill his love, but they could not! And then tear the cloth off of the tree. Then invite the children to come forward and tie on of the white ribbons of love from the tree on their wrist as a reminder that they are very loved. Bless them saying: “Always remember that nothing can ever keep God from loving you. God will always love you!”

**The Fifty Weeks of Easter**

Begin each week by reminding the children that Easter is fifty days of celebrating God’s love. Begin with the tree lights off and then have them sit quietly for about 15 seconds to contemplate God’s great love. Then turn on the lights and let then cheer!!!

I hope these ideas are helpful! Feel free to use them or modify them… and feel free to do something entirely differently. I am anxious to see how you incorporate the sacred moment into your ministries during Lent, Easter Sunday and the fifty weeks of Easter.