



Faith Inkubators Lent 2027 • Theme 1 • Cycle B



HE COMES TO
CHALLENGE



A Faith Inkubators System Theme www.faithink.com Art by Dr. He Qi www.HeQiGallery.com

Carrying Cross by He Qi

- Who do you think is carrying the heavy cross? How do you think they feel?
- Why do you think the artist made the cross so big?
- What do you notice about the different faces in the painting? Do they all look the same, or different?

He Comes to Challenge

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” – **Mark 8:34-36**

USING THIS LEADER’S GUIDE

The following pages are provided to help you optimize the planning and easy implementation of your LENT B experience. They follow the same basic format as our companion PowerPoint presentations. The majority of these pages do not need to be copied for your small groups—they are here to simply aid you and your team in preparation. Each Lent theme includes:

- **WEEK #1 Main Presentation Notes & PowerPoint Instructions (Pages 2 - 8)**
The Opening, Presentation, FAITH5 Small Group Time and Closing are explained in detail for your leadership team.
- **WEEK #2 Celebration Notes & PowerPoint Instructions (Pages 9-13)**
A treasure trove of creative options and supplemental art projects are included for your leadership team’s planning of your time together.
- **SKITS (Pages 14-16)** Your choice of two skits and a puppet show are provided to supplement the theme. The puppet show may also be used as a regular skit with actors. Copy these for readers and leaders of the presentations.
- **QUIZBOWL (Page 17)** Print and use this sheet during small group time or send it home as a fun way to review the theme and connect church to home.

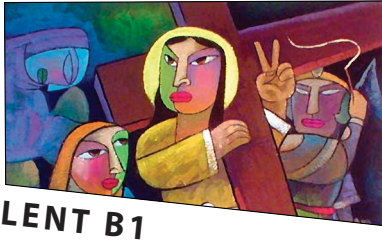
FOCUS FOR LENT B WEEKS 1 AND 2

Weeks 1 and 2 center on Jesus' call to radical discipleship: leaving everything behind to take up the cross and follow him. This is a season for reflection and repentance — an invitation for your group to name the noise, distractions, and clutter that get in the way of following Jesus fully. As you plan, consider how you'll pose Jesus' challenge to your group: will they leave everything and take up their cross to follow him?

Objective

To help all ages encounter this Scripture and respond to Christ's call to deny self, take up the cross, and follow him.





Theme 1: Week 1

Main Presentation

Notes & PowerPoint Instructions

Open the Main PowerPoint Presentation and follow along as you read these next several pages of ideas and instructions for each slide in the PowerPoint.

Tip for the Main and Celebration Presentations: Some slides include additional instructions in the Notes pane, and a few optional slides are hidden by design. In PowerPoint: View > Notes to read them; right-click any slide thumbnail to unhide one.

The ultimate
measure of people
is not where they
stand in moments
of comfort and
convenience, but
where they stand at
times of challenge
and controversy.

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

I. OPENING

Set the pace for the event with an enthusiastic opening that says, “Something great is going to happen.” Use this time to introduce the theme in a fun and memorable way. Each heading below is included as a slide on the PowerPoint presentation. Delete slides not used each week.

A. Gathering Music

Ten minutes before starting time, set the mood with two or three singable, familiar songs relating to the “He Comes to Challenge” theme. Tip: Invite a variety of ages to help lead music. Adults and children together role-modeling joy and enthusiasm will get things started in a powerful and positive way.

Five minutes before starting time, play the theme song from PowerPoint Slide 2. Invite guests to get up, move around the room and dance or greet one another with a hug, a handshake or a high five.

B. Welcome & Introductions

At the stroke of the hour, invite all to chant the countdown (“10, 9, 8, 7...”). Thank everyone for coming, welcome visitors, and make key announcements.

C. Story Time

Light a candle, pull up a rocking chair, or choose another method to create a transition. Share the following story from Luke 12:13-21 in your own words or choose a favorite parable or children’s book on the theme of taking up your cross. (Give each person cross-shaped cookies or hot cross buns fresh from the oven as a little sensory learning to help them remember the story.):

Someone once asked Jesus to tell his brother to divide and share his inheritance with him. Jesus told him he didn’t want to be his judge and that he should watch out for greed. (Luke 12:13) Then Jesus told a parable: A rich man had a problem. He owned so much grain that he didn’t have anywhere to store it all. (v. 16) He decided to tear down his barns and build up larger ones. He could retire, take care of himself, eat, drink, and be merry. (v. 19) That night God said, “Fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (v. 20) Jesus said the same thing will happen to anyone who stores treasures on earth but isn’t rich toward God. In Christ’s challenge to take up your cross, he asks the question: “What does it profit you to gain the whole world but lose your soul?” (Mark 8:36-37) That’s a question worth asking. You may have a full house but an empty home. You may be making a living, but are you making a life? All the stuff you gather in this life will one day be given to someone else. What will you take

with you to the grave? During this season of Lent, it's time to think seriously about that question.

D. Quiz Bowl Game

Invite teams to ring a bell or shout out answers during this quick, fun, fast-moving preview of the theme using the PowerPoint slides.

E. Theme Introduction

The "He Comes to Challenge" theme is introduced with 5 slides including title slides, the Bible verse from Mark 8:34-36, a cartoon, and an overview. These slides will advance themselves and include meditation background music. Preview these before the first presentation to become familiar with the timing.

F. Opening Prayer

Invite guests to inhale, exhale, quiet their minds and bodies, and listen for their heartbeat. If possible, lower lights to signal this quiet meditation. With all eyes closed, thank God for the day and for gathering these people. Ask the Holy Spirit to be present in the short time you have together to give you clear minds and attentive hearts. Then lead the opening prayer using the PowerPoint slides and close in Jesus' name.

G. Theme Scripture Verse

Introduce the theme verse and invite all to read it together. For a fun and effective memorization tool, choose, learn and teach some of the key words using ASL (handspeak.com).

H. Theme Song

Teach the theme song using the music and lyrics embedded on the PowerPoint slide. A full piano score is in your theme folder if you wish to play along or use it with live singers and a band.

II. THEME PRESENTATION

Choose from among the following resources in this section (A-E) to flesh out the theme. View this as a menu. Don't try to do them all! Invite teams to choose, lead, and facilitate different sections. Keep in mind there are two weeks for introducing this theme. Some of the material may be used during Week 2 or in worship to involve the whole congregation in LENT B. **Note:** Delete the slides you don't intend to use from the PowerPoint presentation.

A. Life Line (Personal Faith Story)

This is not something that can be written for you. It must be drawn from the true living curriculum of faith—your people's life experiences. Invite a guest with a significant story related to the theme scripture. Your own honest stories of struggle and faith will do more to witness to God than any facts or intellectual arguments. Invite a person who has heard Christ's radical call to discipleship and was faced with denying self, taking up a cross, and sacrificing something for their faith. Or invite someone who has suffered for their faith or carried a tremendous cross for Christ. Write a thank you for their time and participation. Note: Add your guest's name to the Life Line PowerPoint slide template.

B. Skit or Puppet Sketch

Invite a team to perform one of the three skits (pages 14-16) as a short play, puppet sketch or reader's theater. The puppet skit can also be used as a regular skit without puppets. *Note: Delete the slide for the skits you don't intend to use from the PowerPoint presentation.*

Give up yourself,
and you'll find your
real self... Submit
to death, death of
your ambitions and
favourite wishes
every day and death
of your whole body
in the end... submit
with every fibre of
your being, and you
will find eternal life.

– C.S. Lewis



Even if you
win the rat race,
you're still a rat.

– Bumper Sticker

C. Images and Analogies

Choose one or two of the following or share one of your own teaching points to reinforce the theme. Delete any PowerPoint slides you choose not to use.

1. Theme Photo & He Qi Painting

Take a look at today's cover photo and the original painting by Dr. He Qi. Where are you in this image? How does it relate to the theme?

2. Rat Race

Most people live their lives surrounded by noise. From the moment the alarm blares in the morning, until the time their heads hit the pillow at night, messages, advertising, music, and a myriad of voices call out for our attention and bombard us. Lent is a time to step out of this rat race and focus on the still, small voice of God. Suggestion: As you speak about this hectic life, have a group of actors dressed like rats race through, pounding on kitchen pots with metal spoons and shouting, "Rat race! Rat race!" Try to shout over their noise, "Even Jesus had to get away to a lonely place from time to time." Invite guests to set aside some time during this season of Lent to enter the silence and listen to God each day.

3. Forty Days

Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry to prepare himself for what was to come. Take out a large calendar and "x" out the forty days between Ash Wednesday and the start of Holy Week. Invite guests to count with you. The church is now entering its forty day season of preparation. What are we preparing for? Holy Week, Christ's death, and the resurrection. Distribute FAITH5 Home Devotion Booklets for the appropriate age levels or bookmarks found in your resource folder. Invite each household to commit to spending 5 to 15 minutes a day for the next forty days practicing FAITH5. 1. Share Highs & Lows 2. Read a verse of Scripture 3. Talk about the scripture and apply the verses to your lives 4. Pray for one another and 5. Bless one another.

4. Present Wilderness

When you think of the word "wilderness," what pictures come to mind? Write the words "physical, emotional, and spiritual" on green, red, and white sheets of paper and give a set to each small group. Ask them to brainstorm physical wildernesses people face (medical problems, hunger, house fires, etc.), emotional wildernesses (depression, broken hearts, loss of a job, etc.), and spiritual wildernesses (doubt, emptiness, lack of joy, etc.). Satan came and tempted Jesus during his forty-day wilderness experience. What might a Christian do to guard against temptation when facing each type of wilderness? Invite each small group to report using a flip chart up front for all to see. Ask a small group to present these insights as an "offering that didn't fit in the plate" during worship next Sunday or at a midweek devotion.

5. He Comes to Challenge

Use the PowerPoint slide or write the words "repent, believe, deny, take up cross, and follow" in large letters on a flip chart or a whiteboard. What does each of these words mean? These words are all action verbs. Jesus is making a powerful challenge. A follower of Jesus isn't a spectator. Christ challenges us all to live each day in repentance, faith, sacrifice, and acts of Christly service. This is not a "sit in the back pew" existence. A follower of Jesus is out there in the world witnessing to Christ and making a significant positive difference.

6. Giving Up What?

It is a common practice to deny oneself some pleasure during the season of Lent in order to clear the mind and concentrate more fully on Christ's suffering and death. Ask if anyone has ever given anything up for Lent. What value would there be in such self-denial? Is anyone considering fasting one day a week for the remainder of

Lent? Is anyone considering giving up meat? Television? Video Games? Homework? Giving up something just to brag or show off has little or no value. Giving up something in order to concentrate more fully on God's Word, or Christ's sacrifice, may be extremely valuable. Distribute blank paper and invite small groups to brainstorm ten things they might seriously consider giving up for the season of Lent to help them focus on Christ. Have them circle three of the ten, then vote as a group which of these three they may be willing to covenant to sacrifice. Example: Will you all give up fifteen minutes of tech for the next 40 days to spend time doing FAITH5 with your family or friends each day?

7. Carry a Cross

Some people say taking care of an elderly parent or a disabled child is their "cross to bear." Others call any hardship a "cross." Is that what Jesus was talking about? The cross was a symbol of torture and death, not a symbol of duty, obedience, or inconvenience. *Facilitator note: For young children, soften the physical imagery and focus on love and sacrifice instead of pain.* Ask people to close their eyes and think of a duty they perform out of love. That is not a cross to bear. That is an act of love. As they think, have someone pound a nail into a board somewhere out of sight. Now ask them to think of something they do out of obedience to an authority. This obedience is not a cross to bear, no matter how unpleasant it may be. It is simply a duty. Continue the pounding. Now have them picture something they do for others that is sometimes inconvenient. That is not a cross to bear. It is simply an inconvenience. With eyes still closed, invite them to reach out hands in the shape of a cross. Have them grip their fists tightly and imagine the nails going into their wrists, flinching with each pound. Jesus took the nails in his hands and feet, bearing the pain, so the sins of the world could be forgiven. He sacrificed his life. This was not a duty he had to perform, an obedience he was forced to accept, or a mere inconvenience in his schedule. He willingly took on suffering to set us free. That noble sacrifice to spare others motivated by pure love—that's a cross to bear. What noble thing is God calling you to do? What selfless sacrifice might you make to set another free? What death would you die to bring life to another? This is no small matter for the weak of heart. This is total surrender, absolute selfless love, and death for the sake of resurrection. That's what Jesus was talking about. That's your calling. That's your cross. Nothing less.

8. Cross Marks

In the ancient world, people in mourning would wear itchy cloth (sackcloth) and sit in ashes to show their sorrow. To this day, many Christians receive the sign of the cross traced in ashes on their foreheads to help them remember the suffering Christ took upon himself on their behalf. If your congregation does not practice or have the tradition of an Ash Wednesday service tracing ashes on foreheads, invite a member of each small group forward to receive an ashen cross on their foreheads with the words, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." Have them mark each member of their group with these same words. Finish with a benediction, "Yes, you are dust and to dust you shall return, but in the power of Christ's resurrection, from the dust you shall one day rise."

D. Coming 2 Terms

Use the game show format on the PowerPoint presentation to explore and understand this week's key terms.

E. Bible Time

You have properly opened minds. Now it is time to open the book. If you are doing parts of this theme for congregational worship, consider an "open Bible" talk led by your pastor or a lay person to connect the theme verse with people's lives. Use one or more of the following:

1. Highlight the Verses

Invite everyone to highlight Mark 8:34-36. Assign the following additional verses

There are so many ways to be brave in this world.

Sometimes bravery involves laying down your life for something bigger than yourself, or for someone else.

But sometimes it doesn't.

Sometimes it is nothing more than gritting your teeth through pain, and the work of every day, the slow walk toward a better life.

— Veronica Roth





We are not meant
to die merely in
order to be dead.
God could not want
that for the creatures
to whom God has
given the breath of
life. We die in
order to live.

- Elisabeth Elliot

to small groups and ask them to highlight the verses and write “He Comes to Challenge” in the margins: How does each verse relate to our theme verse?

- Psalm 115:1, 9-18
- Genesis 28:10-17
- Romans 5:1-11

2. Crucifixion Prediction

Read and highlight Psalm 22:1, 16-18 and Mark 15:22-24, marking small crosses in the margins. Christ was quoting the psalm from the cross. What similarities do you see between this text and Christ’s crucifixion? What differences do you see? Was it a coincidence David had predicted the soldiers gambling for Christ’s clothes?

3. What Do You Treasure?

Jesus told a parable about a farmer who stored up great wealth, but lost his life in Luke 12:13-21. Read and discuss this parable today, comparing it to people who are rich in “things” but poor to God.

4. Kairos, Chronos & Tetelestai

There is time, and then there is time. There is time in a chronological sense. There is also time in the sense of a critical moment. Write the words kairos and chronos on a whiteboard or use the slide provided. Invite people to guess what the words mean.

When Jesus said the “time has been fulfilled,” he wasn’t talking about a chronological time (chronos). He was speaking about the critical time of all history (kairos). The time to “repent, believe, deny, take up a cross, and follow” was now. They wouldn’t get this chance again. Jesus was present among them at that moment. The time for action was that moment. If you wish to jump ahead and foreshadow Holy Week, turn guests to John 19:30, underlining “It is finished,” and writing the word “accomplished” in the margins. This is also a kairos word. The Greek word here, tetelestai, literally means “to the end.” (A telescope “sees to the end.”) Jesus is not announcing defeat with his final breath. He is announcing the completion of his mission.

III. FAITH5 SMALL GROUP TIME

Dismiss into small groups providing handouts and coloring pages for each guest. Handouts are based on the FAITH5 methods of conversations, care and learning. Model this each week at church and challenge guests to practice these steps every night in every home using the FAITH5 Take Home Bookmarks found in your Theme folder. Learn more at faithink.com/faith5.

IV. CLOSING

Gather for final reflections, prayers, Holy Communion (optional) and a blessing.

A. Theme Song and Offering

Play, sing and sign the theme song, “Take Up Their Cross.” As people gather, collect an offering for a special cause. Tell children their artwork can be part of the offering.

B. Reflection

Share the summary slide, then invite reflections from each group:

- One **new** thing our group learned about this theme
- One thing our group already **knew** that is worth repeating
- One thing our group would like to **know** more about

AND WHAT ARE YOU GIVING UP
FOR LENT THIS YEAR, FREIDA?

CHURCH.



God's peace is not something finished and done with... not ours to keep forever. The peace is won by accompanying God into the battle. It is then it grows, becomes new and real. It is in battle we feel the peace.

– Bishop Eivind Berggrav
of Norway

C. PTA Prayers (Praise, Thank, and Ask)

Invite each Small Group to provide at least one "PTA" (Praise God, Thank Jesus, Ask the Holy Spirit) prayer based on the Highs and Lows shared in their small group.

D. Holy Communion (Optional)

Consistent with your congregation's practice regarding who may lead this, pour the wine, break the bread and share the Lord's Supper. Consider doing this in small groups.

E. Theme Verse

Review the theme Bible verse and American Sign Language one last time to help guests embed the Scripture in their long-term memory. Visit handspeak.com to learn signing for key words or have a guest who knows ASL teach it.

F. Prayer Journey

Invite guests to sit, relax, breathe deeply, stretch and close eyes. Soft music embedded in the PowerPoint slide will play as you read the following meditation dramatically.

Imagine yourself in Bible times on the edge of a rocky desert village. The sun is beating down as you stand near your ancestor's well, watering sheep. You feel sweat trickle down your back.

Sheep are "baaing" and flies are buzzing. You raise a hand to shield your eyes and squint into the heat waves rising from the desert. The shape of a man comes into view, trudging toward you. His hair is matted, his eyes glazed. The sheep sense the stranger and move from the well as he approaches.

There is a wildness in his eyes and dust in his throat. He greets you. You offer him a



You can never learn
that Christ is all you
need, until Christ is
all you have.

– Corrie ten Boom

drink from a wooden cup. He smiles, takes the bucket from your hands, and pours the water over his head. “The time is fulfilled,” this strange desert mystic says, “The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent. Believe the good news!” (pause) Good news? (pause) Good news. You ponder what he means. You could use some good news for a change. Life is all drudgery and poverty here on the edge of nowhere. But just as you turn to ask him what good news he wants you to believe, he is gone.

Time passes. Weeks. Months. Three years. You find yourself in the big city—Jerusalem—for the celebration of the Passover holiday with your cousins. The streets are filled with noise, laughter, smells, foods, temptation—so much more than the dreary little village you call home.

You are haggling with a merchant about the price of cloth when you see the strange desert mystic again. This time he is sitting beneath a fig tree, surrounded by a crowd of rabbis and rabble. His tunic is white and clean. His hair is washed and combed, but those wild desert eyes are the same. He nods as you approach, as if he remembers. He speaks: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

Your cousins grab you by the arm to pull you away. You are late for your holiday dinner. As you turn to go, you wonder again what good news this desert man is talking about. How could his “gospel” touch your soul? You could use some good news for a change. For your life. For your people. For your world. But what good news could there be in taking up a cross?

Lord Jesus, you step into the desert of our lives and issue your challenge to follow. Bring us the good news that goes with the cross; the gospel that goes beyond the cross to the grave and the open tomb. We pray in your name, amen.

G. Blessing and Dismissal

Turn to your neighbor and trace the sign of the cross on one another’s hand or forehead while repeating the thematic blessing found on the PowerPoint slide:

“(Name), child of God, you shall rise from the dust one day in the power of Christ’s resurrection.”

FAITH5 Home Huddle Challenge: *Be sure to print and send the FAITH5 bookmarks home with guests. Challenge everyone to huddle up with loved ones or via tech each night this week and practice FAITH5. It’s the best tool we know to connect church with home, and people to each other and to God.*



THEME 1: WEEK 2

Celebration Notes & PowerPoint Instructions

Open up the Celebration PowerPoint Presentation and follow along as you read these next several pages of ideas and instructions for Week #2 of the theme.

I. OPENING

A. Gathering Music Set the mood of joy and vitality with familiar, singable songs or play the soft music embedded in slide 1. At the stroke of the hour, get everyone on their feet to greet one another while playing "Take Up Their Cross" from slide 2.

B. Welcome, Introductions, and Theme Reviews Begin the countdown "10, 9, 8, 7..." and re-introduce the theme. Make announcements, introduce guests and review the "He Comes to Challenge" theme with slides 5-9. These are set to music on a timer so they will advance themselves. Invite guests to read along quietly with the slides.

C. Theme Song Sing and sign the song, "Take Up Their Cross," using the music on slide 10 or with a live band.

II. SMALL GROUP PREP TIME

Give Small Groups the time, space, and resources to complete a Theme Art project chosen from the Theme Arts section (pages 10-13) and prepare to present it to the entire group. Type titles on the provided blank PowerPoint slides.

III. CELEBRATION SHOW & TELL

On with the show! Invite Small Groups up one by one to share their chosen art project. To keep the pace, invite one group "on deck" prior to each act so they are ready to jump up and present.

IV. CLOSING

A. Theme Song Sing and sign "Take Up Their Cross" as you gather. Consider taking an offering as guests return from Small Group time.

B. PTA Prayers (Praise, Thank, Ask) Praise God, thank Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to be with all as they go out to live the theme this week. Consider inviting each group to share one PTA prayer from their highs and lows.

C. Holy Communion (Optional)

Consistent with your congregation's practice regarding who may lead this, pour the wine, break the bread and share the Lord's Supper. Consider doing this in small groups.

D. Wrap-up Reflection Thank guests for participating, then reflect on the theme using the theme verse and quotation slides provided. Music will play in the background as these slides advance themselves.

E. Blessing and Dismissal Invite everyone to turn to their neighbor and trace the sign of the cross on each other's forehead or palms with the words: "(Name), child of God, you shall rise from the dust one day in the power of Christ's resurrection."

Close with the dismissal printed on the slide.



Theme Arts

This section is designed to be used in groups during FAITH5 Small Group Time on Week #2. It is set up to work with the Celebration PowerPoint Presentation slides. Groups will interpret the theme using these arts and present their creations to the large group as “show and tell” offerings. We suggest using one of these options:

- Print and distribute these pages to each small group. Let them choose one theme art project to create and present. Involve everyone in the group in both the creation and presentation.
- Set up and use these as stations in a rotation model.
- Choose one of the following options for all small groups to create either separately or as one large group project.

For added impact, present some of these arts in worship as children’s sermons, during the offering as an “offering that didn’t fit in the plate,” or during coffee hour.



LENT B1

Inspiration usually comes during work, rather than before it.

– Madeleine L'Engle

Acrostics

Make up a phrase out of the first letters from the words “Challenge” or another theme from the lesson. Display this on a flip chart, poster board, or PowerPoint and present it to the group. Use the acrostics below as an example to get started:

H-eaven and
E-arth

C-all
O-ur
M-inds to
E-nter this
S-eason

T-o
O-pen ourselves

C-hrist challenges!

H-eed
A-lways the
L-ord of
L-ove
E-verything
N-ow is
G-od's
E-verything

Art Gallery

Use the PowerPoint slides provided, plus scans of your own original art, to celebrate the theme in images. For added impact, invite a group to create a banner, poster or wall hanging with the theme verse and the words “He Comes to Challenge.” Raise this new piece of art into the air on fishing line at the moment you unveil the theme. Color copies of the cover art and place them strategically around the building. If building a PowerPoint presentation, add favorite thematic quotations and show them while playing soft background music. Show the presentation during worship or midweek devotions.

Clown Sketch “Losing it All”

CHARACTERS: 5 Clowns, 1 Empty-Handed Clown

PROPS: A door marked “Eternal Door,” toys, two mirrors, fancy clothes, a photo of a car, a laundry bag stuffed with newspapers with a “\$” sign printed on it

First Clown enters carrying armloads of toys and approaches the door. Clown attempts to open the door, but can’t reach the knob due to the heavy toys. Second Clown enters carrying a mirror in each hand and smiling at herself. She approaches the door, but can’t open it without setting the mirror aside. Third Clown enters with

armloads of clothing. Fourth Clown enters with the picture of a car. Neither can grab the knob without putting down their items. Fifth Clown comes in, weighed down by the money bag. Finally, Empty-Handed Clown walks in, looks around, then picks up the cross and moves toward the Eternal Door. The door opens on its own and the Clown walks through as Mark 8:34-36 is read.

Cartoon

Create an original cartoon based on the verse of the week, the theme or one aspect of the signs that point to Jesus' coming, or enlarge and color or paint one of the cartoons in this theme and use it during the unveiling time. Consider leaving the "punch line" out until the unveiling moment. Print the cartoon in the bulletin or parish paper and stage a "Punch Line in the Plate" contest among worshippers. As an alternative, add your own punch line to the cartoon template provided in the PowerPoint slide.

Interpretive Movement

Create an interpretive dance based on the theme song or a favorite Lenten hymn. Invite a small choral group or your church choir to sing while the movement is being shared. As an alternative, learn the American Sign Language for the verse of the week and teach it to the group with percussion or wind chimes playing in the background. Bring this visual hymn performance group into worship or use during midweek devotions to share as an expression of the verse through song.

Interviews

Interview a disabled veteran, police officer, or firefighter about the theme "taking up your cross." What did they sacrifice in the service of others? Why did they risk it? How was their sacrifice like Christ's sacrifice? How does Christ's challenge to take up a cross relate to suffering for the sake of another? If you can't find a public servant for this interview, ask people exiting worship: "What does it mean to take up a cross and follow Jesus?"

Parable by Rich Melheim

Invite a small group to read the following parable aloud, act it out, and comment on it. Consider inviting a group to write and share an original parable on the theme:

Once there was a church that couldn't afford a cross in its sanctuary. Each Sunday during the processional, different people would hold out their arms in the shape of a cross and the youth group would carry them in and set them upon the altar. When the person in the role of the cross would tire or falter, other members of the congregation would sense their weariness and step in to take their place. Each person, young and old, would take a turn so no one would suffer undue weariness. Then one day a wealthy member of the church, tired of taking her turn, decided to hire a stand-in. This allowed her to sit comfortably in the pew without making a spectacle of herself. Soon others followed the practice and hired their own replacements. And others. And others. After a while it became so fashionable to hire stand-ins that all but the poorest members of the church made it their common practice. Parishioners discovered that, with the proper stand-in, they didn't have to show up at all. They could pay their dues and sleep in with a clear conscience, knowing their money had taken the place of their presence. People who actually took up the role of the cross were considered odd and show-offs. Today, the pews of this church are usually empty and most of the cross-bearing is left in the hands of professionals who are paid to do it.

The ultimate test of a person's conscience may be their willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard.

– Gaylord Nelson





LENT B1

Commitment means
that it is possible for
a person to yield the
nerve center of his
consent to a purpose
or cause, a move-
ment or an ideal,
which may be more
important to him
than whether he
lives or dies.

– Howard Thurman

Photo/Slide Shows

Create a photography display or PowerPoint presentation based on the verse or the “He Comes to Challenge” theme. For a multimedia dimension, add the theme song or traditional Lenten music.

Poetry

Write a poem or a haiku (5 syllables, 7 syllables, 5 syllables) on the theme “He Comes To Challenge.” Distribute copies of your work and read it aloud during opening, closing, or in worship. Publish your poems in the church bulletin or newsletter. If you choose not to write a poem, read and comment on this one by Bryan Sirchio:

Once there was a farmer whose lands produced so well
his barns could not contain the excess grain.
He built his barns up larger and then said to himself,
“I’ve all that I need now saved away.”
But God said to him, “Fool, tonight your soul shall be required,
and all this wealth of yours, whose will it be?”
And if my soul should be required tonight, what would Jesus say to me?
And if my soul should be required tonight, would my treasure stay with me?
Would he find me rich in things, or find me rich in Christ,
If my soul should be required tonight?
(From the song “Wise As Serpents”)

Prayer Journey

Write a guided meditation on the theme of “He Comes To Challenge,” or on the verse of the week. Play the theme song live or use the instrumental version from the music provided as background. Lower lights, warm the group up with stretching and breathing exercises and light a candle. Add the senses (smell, taste, touch, hearing, sight) to your prayer experience. Speak quietly, clearly, and slowly. Include the theme verse at the core of the journey. Leave room for the verse to sink in and the Holy Spirit to speak.

Puppets

Use the puppet sketch provided or write your own original short sketch on the theme. Design, create and collect your own puppets and props.

Rap, Chant or Cheer

Turn the verse of the week or the lesson theme into a rap, chant or cheer. If you get stuck, try this one:

If any want to follow me... (echo)
You gotta take your cross... (echo)
If any would my fol’wers be... (echo)
You gotta face the loss... (echo)
If any try to save their lives... (echo)
They’ll lose them in the end... (echo)
But those who gladly give their lives... (echo)
Forever are my friends... (echo)
(repeat first two lines)

Servant Event

There are Christians and people of other faiths in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Sudan, Indonesia, China, Iran, and other parts of the world who are severely persecuted for their faith. Gather guests into small groups and go online to find a situation in the news. Look up the names of the people who are being persecuted and the organizations who are trying to help them. Go on Facebook or another social networking site and contact them personally, asking them how you can help bring their case to the world's attention. E-mail the President, Senators, and congressional officials about the larger issue of religious persecution. Check out www.persecution.org to petition the President for specific prisoners. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation on the subject. For a project closer to home, go online to your national church refugee resettlement board and gather names of people who need asylum, resettlement, or help in escaping persecution for their faith.

It is more difficult,
and it calls for
higher energies of
soul, to live a martyr
than to die one.

– Horace Mann

Theme Song with Movement

Ask a musician, small group, or a member of your Music Team to perform and teach the theme song, "Take Up Their Cross" or to create their own original song based on the verse of the week. After you've learned the song, add movement or American Sign Language to make the song come alive. Arrange to perform this song as a litany with the choir during worship.

Video

Create a three-minute video on the theme "Take Up Their Cross." Involve every member of the small group either in front or behind the camera. For a contrasting piece, start with clips of homeless people on the street, hungry children in a food line, or victims of war from magazine or newspaper photos. Intersperse famous crucifixion paintings from a library art book. For an interview piece, ask people of different ages the following questions: "When someone says, 'It's the cross I have to bear,' what are they saying?" and "Have you ever taken up a cross for someone or some cause?" If you'd rather use related clips from movies, consider the crucifixion scene from *Godspell* or *Jesus Christ Superstar*.



Recrutin'

SLOGAN

Skit 1

CHARACTERS: McSwindle, Assistants 1-3, Secretary Angel.

SETTING: Secretary is reading a magazine and doing nails at a desk in heaven as McSwindle and Assistants approach.

PROPS: Magazine, desk, nail polish, business card, phone, thunder sound effect.

McSWINDLE: Let me do the talking. I'll show you how a pro makes a sale.

ASSISTANT 1: Do you think he'll go for it, boss?

McSWINDLE: The sale's as good as done. Watch me. (Approaching Secretary and clearing throat.) Hmmmm. Hmmmm. Hmmmm. (She doesn't notice until he jumps onto the desk and makes a loud noise into her face.) Uh hummm!

SECRETARY: (Lowering magazine) Hello. You wanted to see someone?

McSWINDLE: How kind of you to notice. I'm wondering if I can speak with God?

SECRETARY: Any time. You don't even need an appointment. Why?

McSWINDLE: McSwindle's the name. Consulting and campaign slogans are the game. (Handing Secretary a card) I'd like to speak to the Almighty about this little recruiting campaign God started.

SECRETARY: Recruiting campaign?

ASSISTANT 2: Yeah. Your campaign slogan has got to go.

(Secretary glares at Assistant.)

McSWINDLE: What my impetuous associate means to say is, we have some suggestions that we believe will result in a rather immediate gain in market share.

SECRETARY: Market share?

ASSISTANT 3: Yeah. We can do better.

SECRETARY: (Picking up phone)

I'll see what I can do. (Speaking to phone) Hello? Yes. Yes. (Pausing and reading card) McSwindle Consulting to see you about your recruiting slogan. (Pause) I'll see. (To McSwindle) Which recruiting slogan exactly are we talking about here?

McSWINDLE: The "Take Up Your Cross" campaign.

SECRETARY: (On phone) You got that? Yeah. I'll see. (To McSwindle) What's the problem with the slogan?

McSWINDLE: Well, you don't expect anyone to take you up on that, do you? I mean, "If anyone would become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Pul-eeze! It's got to go.

SECRETARY: (To phone) He says it's got to go. (Pausing) Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. (To McSwindle) And what's the problem?

McSWINDLE: Well, for starters, this followers bit is a tad, shall we say, passé! No one wants to be a follower of anyone any more. We think it should be...

ASSISTANTS 1-3: (Chanting) If any want to become my equals!

SECRETARY: (Laughing in phone) Ha! Yeah. You heard it right. (Pause) Ha! Okay. I'll see. (To McSwindle) What else?

McSWINDLE: Well, this "deny yourself" is so Middle Ages. Think 21st Century. No one is interested in denying anything. I think we should make it...

ASSISTANTS 1-3: Let them indulge themselves!

SECRETARY: (To phone) If anyone would become my equals, let them indulge themselves... (Pause) Yeah. Yeah. You heard it. (To McSwindle) What else?

McSWINDLE: Okay. This "take up your

cross and follow me" angle isn't going to play. We're not into sacrifice, and pain anymore. We'll change it to...

ASSISTANTS 1-3: Take up your dreams and follow them!

SECRETARY: (To phone) Take up your dreams and... (Pause) Oh. You heard. (To McSwindle) Is that all?

McSWINDLE: No. There's more. We also suggest you get rid of the "those who save their lives will lose them and those who lose their lives for my sake and the Gospel will find them." We change to...

ASSISTANTS 1-3: Grab for all the gusto you can get!

SECRETARY: (To phone) Yeah. You heard right. (To McSwindle) Anything else?

McSWINDLE: Almost done. Here's the clincher. We replace "for what does it profit them if they gain the whole world but lose or forfeit their souls" with...

ASSISTANTS 1-3: Whoever dies with the most toys wins!

SECRETARY: I think we've heard about enough. Tell you what, I'll type all this up and submit it to the celestial slogan committee. They'll get back to you.

McSWINDLE: Wait. Let's go through it once more so you're sure to have it down. Ready? Hit it!

ASSISTANTS 1-3: If anyone would become my equals...

ASSISTANT 1: Let them indulge themselves...

ASSISTANT 2: And take up your dreams and follow them!

McSWINDLE: Don't forget to grab for all the gusto you can get!

McSWINDLE & ASSISTANTS: And whoever dies with the most toys wins!

McSWINDLE: So, what do you think? (Grabbing phone) So! What do you think? Have we got a deal? The contract? Do you like our suggestions?

(A loud crack of thunder is heard.)

McSWINDLE: I'll take that to be a yes?

(A louder crack of thunder is heard. McSwindle and Assistants cower behind the Secretary.)

McSWINDLE: A no? Okay. A no. We'll go back to the drawing board and...

SECRETARY: I think it's safe to say God's going to keep the slogan Jesus came up with just the way it is.

McSWINDLE: What? That was Jesus' slogan? No wonder it didn't fly. We're competing with the Boss's son.

The DEBACLE

Skit 2

CHARACTERS: Narrator, Prince, Wormwood, Henchmen 1-3

SETTING: Inside Satan's Bunker

PROPS: Helmet, binoculars

NARRATOR: And now the (your church) Not-Ready-For-Anytime Players proudly present "The Debacle." We take you to an underground bunker where Wormwood, first assistant to the Prince of Darkness, and his two demonic henchmen are filled with trepidation at the repercussions of their diabolical master's failed mission to earth.

WORMWOOD, HENCHMAN 1 & 2: (Wormwood and Henchmen enter sporting foolish grins and speaking in cartoonish voices.) We're what?

NARRATOR: You're afraid your boss is going to be mad when he gets back because he botched his three temptations with Jesus.

WORMWOOD, HENCHMAN 1 & 2: Ooohh.

WORMWOOD: (Scanning horizon with binoculars and cringing) Ooooooh. The boss is not going to be happy about this one. Three temptations in the wilderness and Jesus didn't fall for any of them. Let's get out of here. (Ominous music plays as they exit.)

NARRATOR: A foul, musky odor fills the room. The air is still as death and a black mist vaporizes before them. (Prince walks in) Then from the mist...

PRINCE: Ahem.

NARRATOR: (Ignoring Prince) Then from the mist a dark and sinister pair of dull yellow eyes...

PRINCE: Ahem.

NARRATOR: (Ignoring Prince) ...dull, pallid eyes appear and the stench.

PRINCE: Ahem.

NARRATOR: (Annoyed) What? I'm trying to announce the entrance of the Prince of Darkness.

PRINCE: I'll do my own entrance, thank you very much. Now buzz off.

NARRATOR: What happened to the mist? The stench? The ominous...

PRINCE: I'm using a deodorant now. Beat it. (Yelling off stage) Wormwood!

WORMWOOD! Get that cut-throat band of goons you call demons in here on the double! Now! I don't suppose I need to tell you how depressed I am.

HENCHMAN 1 & 2: What is it, O Prince of Darkness? O Mighty Evil One. O Master of Disaster?

WORMWOOD: Why so sad?

PRINCE: Mine countenance hath fallen because Jesus didn't fall for any of it!

HENCHMAN 1: (Cartoonish voice) Any of what, O mighty Lord of Evil? O übermeister of the underworld. O...

PRINCE: Zip it or lose it! (Grabbing Wormwood by the throat) What are we going to do? What? Think!

WORMWOOD: (High pitched voice) I could think a whole lot better if there was some blood going to my brain.

PRINCE: (Dropping him) Oh. Sorry.

HENCHMEN: (Laughing) Ha ha ha!!!

PRINCE: Silence! (Henchmen cower)

WORMWOOD: (Clearing throat) Now. Let's get the story straight. You had him out in the wilderness for forty days?

PRINCE: Forty days in the wilderness. I had him at his weakest. Hunger. Deprivation. Thirst.

HENCHMEN: (Laughing) No wifi.

PRINCE: Silence! (Henchmen cower).

WORMWOOD: And you tempted him with the three best temptations?

PRINCE: (Sobbing on Wormwood's shoulder) I gave him my best stuff.

WORMWOOD: (Handing Prince a box of tissue) The stones to bread.

PRINCE: (Blowing nose) Stones to bread.

WORMWOOD: The "jump off a high place without a parachute and the angels will catch you" routine?

PRINCE: (Blowing nose) My favorite one. Sob! He didn't fall for it.

HENCHMEN: (Laughing) Fall for it! Ha! Oh, that's a good one, Oh Minister of Sinister, Oh Sustainer of the Slimy, Oh...

PRINCE: (Glaring at them) Grrrr...

HENCHMAN 2: We'll just be quiet now.

WORMWOOD: And you did the "bow down and worship me and I'll give you the world" bit. He didn't fall for that?

HENCHMAN 2: I'd have fallen for that.

PRINCE: Nothing worked! (Sob) I'm a failure. A failure! (Breaking down)

WORMWOOD: (Grabbing Prince's face) Master! Master! Get a grip. (Slapping Prince. Henchmen cower.) Ooooooh. I shouldn't have done that.

PRINCE: That's okay. I needed that. (Sniff) I've got to think. Think!

HENCHMAN 1: Uh, might I be so bold as to interject a possible route to the solution of this conundrum?

EVERYONE: What?

HENCHMAN 1: I got an idea to fix the problem.

PRINCE: All right. (Sniff) But it had better be good.

HENCHMEN 1: Here's the deal. Jesus might have taken the difficult road. He might have resisted temptation. He might be willing to deny himself and take up the cross. But none of his followers are that dedicated. None. Nada.

PRINCE: (Snapping up) You're right! They're all a bunch of self-indulgent softies! They'll not follow him if it means sacrifice, suffering, and denial!

HENCHMAN 2: Da-nile. It's not just "da river" in Egypt, you know.

PRINCE: What?

HENCHMAN 2: Joke. Little joke.

NARRATOR: Will Christians take up Christ's cross? Will they follow him? Or will they give in to temptation, take the easy road and follow the Prince of Darkness? Stay tuned next week for the continuing saga of "The Debacle." (Sinister music, bows and applause.)

Take Up Your CROSS

Puppet Play of the Week

CHARACTERS: Narrator, Puppets 1, 2, 3 (You may wish to name your puppets)

SETTING: Narrator stands in front of the curtain and to the side. Puppets pop up from behind the curtain.

PROPS: Curtain (blanket on a pole) snack bag, headphones, large Bible verse, music player and a favorite song.

NARRATOR: Hi everyone! Welcome to our puppet show. I think we are ready to start. Let me check behind the curtain to see if the puppets are ready. (Looking behind curtain and calling) Puppets! (Begin music)

PUPPET 1: (Popping up) Hi! Could you get back to me later? I'm busy right now. I have some snacks and I'm about to play my favorite online game. (Loudly crinkling bag and chomping)

PUPPET 2: (Popping up wearing headphones, moving to the music) Were you looking for me?

PUPPET 3: (Popping up, stretching and groaning, cranky) Nobody can get any sleep around here. My good old b-e-d is calling. I'm out of here. (Starting to exit. Music is lowered)

NARRATOR: Wait just a minute, all of you! We have some very exciting and important things to learn

about today! In today's lesson, Jesus is talking about the way he wants people to live their lives. He challenges them to "take up their cross and follow."

PUPPET 3: I feel cross! I can relate to that part.

PUPPET 1: Do you think Jesus cares about the way we live our lives?

PUPPET 2: (Taking off his head set) Does Jesus care about me, too?

NARRATOR: Jesus said, "If you want to become my followers, deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me." When Jesus talks about denying ourselves and taking up a cross he means that we sacrifice, or give up something, like he did on the cross.

PUPPET 1: Will we have to die?

PUPPET 2: Give up our life?

PUPPET 3: Die? I'm still trying to wake up!

NARRATOR: No, most Christians aren't usually asked to die, but Jesus does challenge us to love him and his people so much that we don't spend all of our time thinking about what would be easy for us personally. We might have cut out some of our pleasures and (speaking to Puppet 3) even our sleep at times to make it happen.

PUPPET 3: Cut down on my sleep! Now you are starting to wake

me up!

PUPPET 1: Does this mean no more online games or munchies?

PUPPET 2: Or music? Or television?

NARRATOR: We can enjoy good things in our lives but Jesus asks us to learn about him and love him so much that we will want to do what we can for God. He offers big rewards for his followers.

PUPPET 1: Big rewards?

PUPPET 2: Like money?

PUPPET 3: Or fame? Will I be important?

NARRATOR: No, it usually doesn't mean money or fame. But the reward is the peace and joy in our hearts that doing things for the love of Jesus brings.

PUPPET 1: When people say, "Get a life!" That's probably what they mean.

NARRATOR: I think you're right! Listen to what our Bible verse says about that. (Have Bible verse ready on a big sheet of paper to display on PowerPoint slide and ask a volunteer from the audience to read) From Mark 8:34-36: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"

PUPPET 1: It sounds like loving Jesus and living our lives for him is what this is all about!

PUPPET 2: I can do that!

PUPPET 3: Me, too! Let's head home, (Yawning) I feel a nap coming on. (Puppets exit.)

NARRATOR: Thanks puppets and (to audience) thank you, too, for being such good listeners.

quiz bowl



Answers in Bold

QUESTION 1: For the church, Lent is seen primarily as: A) a time to eat soup and sandwiches, B) the end of the church year, **C) a time for reflection, preparation, and repentance**, D) the anniversary of St. Lenti who drove the teenagers from the church during the middle ages

QUESTION 2: When Jesus said his followers should “take up their cross,” he meant: A) we should get a cross tattoo, B) we needed to find a new hobby, C) we should go to church, **D) his followers needed to accept his radical call to discipleship**

QUESTION 3: Jesus challenged his followers to be: A) informed about the latest in fashion, B) ambidextrous, C) able to turn a crisp baseball double-play, **D) willing to endure hardship and rejection for their faith**

QUESTION 4: The word “repent” means: **A) to turn away from sin**, B) one who pents, C) to say you’re sorry, but not back it up, D) none of the above

QUESTION 5: At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness in order to: A) learn about the local vegetation, B) spend a few days at a spa, **C) prepare himself for what was to come**, D) study the New Testament

QUESTION 6: How long is the season of Lent? A) 17 days, B) A minute and a half, **C) 40 days**, D) ask my pastor

QUESTION 7: Lent prepares us for: **A) Christ’s death and resurrection**, B) tax season, C) spring, D) a dinner of ham and scalloped potatoes

QUESTION 8: What is a “wilderness” Christians face today? A) the lure of money, B) overly-demanding careers, C) relationships with others, **D) all of the above, and much more**

QUESTION 9: Jesus challenges his followers to: A) be more than just spectators, B) live each day in repentance and faith, C) sacrifice and live a life of Christ-like service, **D) all of the above**

QUESTION 10: The verse of the week tells us, “If any want to become my followers...” A) “let them eat cake,” B) **“let them deny themselves,”** C) “let it be,” D) “let it be me”