

Full-Interactive Online Education:
Lent: Dying, Rising, and Living Anew

Featuring Dr. Richard H. Lowery, Ph.D.

With additional commentary and discussion by Pastor Linda McCrae

Fee is \$79.99 per person

Registration is open NOW!

Register online at www.transformingthechurch.org

This course explores the Hebrew Bible lections for Lent in the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, beginning with the alternate suggested reading for Ash Wednesday and ending with the Fifth Sunday in Lent.

Videos will begin with lectures by Dr. Lowery will reflect on each week's text from the Hebrew Bible, placing it in its broader historical, social, political, and theological context. Lectures for the Sundays in Lent will be followed by conversations between Dr. Lowery and Rev. Linda McCrae which will explore connections between the Hebrew Bible lection and the gospel reading and begin to think about how these texts might be preached.

Christian College and TransformingTheChurch.org have endeavored to make this course as RELEVANT and as ACCESSIBLE to as many Pastors as possible. Our pricing is set in order to ensure that even those on a "lean" professional development or educational budget can participate. This is not only fresh, new content for Lenten preparation, but affords several hours of direct interaction with the instructor. We believe that the VALUE is unsurpassed, and we offer this course to the Church and Its Servants with hopes that you can participate.

Fully-Interactive Online Education

Using TransformingTheChurch.org's "Watch – Discuss – Do!" approach to online education, the course consists of five video-on-demand sessions of Dr. Lowery's lecture and the discussions between Dr. Lowery and Pastor McCrae and five fully-interactive live online sessions with Dr. Lowery for questions and further discussion among the participants of the class. The course is for five weeks. Each week, online students will view one video-on-demand session and participate in one fully-interactive live online session with Dr. Lowery.

Best-practices for transformation through online learning and consultation processes ... resources you can use!



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About the Course

The course consists of six video-on-demand sessions (a total of over four hours of high-quality video) and six 60-minute live online discussions with Dr. Lowery that will be paced throughout the sermon preparation period for the Lenten season. As with all of our distance learning courses, participants can join the Virtual Classroom for this course from anywhere with nothing more than a browser and a broadband Internet connection. Registration for this course will be available on December 31, 2012.

Session 1:

Lent, from an old English word for “spring” (the root of our word, “length,” referring to the longer days of spring in the Northern hemisphere), has its origin in the period of study and spiritual preparation for new Christian converts before baptism on Easter eve. Over time, the entire Christian community came to express its solidarity with the new converts by joining them in prayer and fasting during this time. As preparation for baptism, the ritual “dying” to this world and rebirth into new, eternal life in Christ, Lent is a time of reflection, repentance, and release of those things in life that hinder our full commitment to the way of compassion and mercy taught and modeled by Jesus. This session focuses on the alternate reading for Ash Wednesday in the Revised Common Lectionary, Isaiah 58. From an anonymous post-exilic Jerusalem disciple of the eighth century prophet Isaiah ben Amoz, this Hebrew Bible lection reminds us that the purpose of prayer and fasting is to strengthen our commitment to justice and our compassion for all people, especially the vulnerable.

Session 2:

This lection reminds the people of God that they owe their very existence to the gracious mercy of God, who is revealed to the world in the exodus, the liberation of slaves from their imperial oppressor. Because they have been released from bondage and allowed to live as free people in a “land flowing with milk and honey,” the people must take the first portion of each harvest and share it with the whole community, especially with those who are most economically vulnerable -- priests and immigrants living among them -- to celebrate the gracious mercy of God, the true source of the nation’s prosperity. The gospel lection, Luke 4:1-13, describes Jesus’s 40-day fast in the wilderness, a time of preparation before he begins his public ministry. During his long fast, Jesus resists the temptations of the devil, asserting his total reliance on the grace of God for life and sustenance.

Session 3:

The Genesis story begins with God’s promise to reward Abram and be his “shield.” In the ancient world, the ultimate and most important reward was to have children. Later biblical writers would believe that people may be resurrected at some point after they die and given spiritual bodies that last forever. For the writers of Genesis, however, there was no possibility of meaningful individual life beyond the grave. You lived on through your children. So it’s not surprising that Abram wonders how his promised reward would be “very great,” since Abram and his wife are old and childless. God points Abram toward the nighttime sky and says he’ll have descendants as numerous as the stars. Abram trusts this seemingly impossible promise, and God considers Abram to be in right relationship to God. God appears to Abram in a dream in the form of a fire-pot and torch, moving between the pieces of the sacrificed animals, symbolically “signing” the astonishing promise that countless descendents of Abram and Sarai will be citizens of the land they currently wander as immigrants.

Session 4:

"Second Isaiah" saw the hand of God in current political events, especially in the coming invasion of Babylon by the Persian emperor Cyrus, and believed (correctly) that Cyrus would allow the descendants of Jewish exiles to go to their ancestral homeland and rebuild. YHWH, the God of Israel, had been revealed in the act of liberating Hebrew slaves from Egypt. Second Isaiah believed that YHWH was acting through Cyrus to liberate Jewish exiles and to reveal that YHWH, the God of tiny, defeated Israel is in fact the one universal God. In this final exhortation, Second Isaiah urges the exiles to trust the seemingly impossible promise of God, to have faith that freedom and security surely are coming, that God will provide more than enough for the people to survive and thrive. It seems absurd, but, God says, "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways."

Session 5:

This reading from Joshua represents a milestone in Israel's process of liberation. Now in the "promised land," Israel camps at "Gilgal" (literally, "rolling"), and Joshua issues an order that all males be circumcised. This episode ends where today's passage begins (verse 9), with a pun relating the place to the ritual practice of "rolling back" the foreskin and then tying the ritual and place to the story of Israel's freedom: "Today, I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt. So the place is called Gilgal ("rolling") to this very day." A new episode begins in verse 10 when the people observe passover, the "independence day" celebration of Israel's emancipation. As soon as passover ends, the people eat the produce of the promised land for the first time. The process of liberation is complete. The gospel lection (Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32), the "parable of the prodigal son" or perhaps, "the parable of the elder son," picks up the themes of the Joshua lection.

Session 6:

This Isaiah lection draws on the ancient tradition of the exodus to announce a radical new intervention by Israel's God YHWH. For Second Isaiah the invasion of Babylonia by the Persian emperor Cyrus opened up the possibility that Jewish exiles would now experience a "new exodus." Jerusalem is roughly west of Babylonia, with a huge and harsh desert in between. But just as YHWH parted the waters of the Sea to allow Hebrew slaves to escape their masters, so too YHWH now will open a way of liberation where no such route of escape seemed possible. God will pave a superhighway in the wilderness, with miraculous oases planted all the way from Babylonia to Jerusalem. The prophet calls the exiles to open their eyes and their hearts to see God's new and utterly surprising act of liberation springing forth in the world at this very moment.

Online Distance Learning: For Anyone, From Anywhere, At Anytime

Clergy interested in this Lenten sermon preparation will be encouraged to take this course which has been produced to assist as many pastors as possible. Anyone with a broadband Internet connection and a web browser capable of running Adobe Flash will be able to participate and interact from their homes or offices at any time. In addition, participants are provided with an interactive online learning community to discuss classes and application topics with other students under the supervision of Dr. Lowery.

About Rick Lowery

Richard H. Lowery, Ph.D. Yale, is adjunct professor of Hebrew Bible at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky, where he served as dean, and Phillips Theological Seminary in Oklahoma, where he served 17 years as a tenured professor. He also teaches in the commissioned and licensed ministers program at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis and in the M.Div. program at Methodist Theological School in Ohio. He has also taught at Phillips University, Valparaiso University, Yale University, and Yale Divinity School. Rick recently moved to Indianapolis to live full-time with his wife, the Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). He blogs for Huffington Post, speaks at church gatherings throughout the US and Canada, and has written articles and lessons for scholarly and popular publications, including *The Chalice Introduction to the Old Testament* and journals of preaching and stewardship. He is the author of three books, including *Sabbath and Jubilee*, and wrote the Bible commentary for the *Storyteller's Companion: Daniel and Revelation*. He's currently working on a book, *Genesis and Human Rights*. Rick is a past president of the Society of Biblical Literature Southwest Region and serves on the executive committee of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission where he is a member of the study group on moral discernment in the churches. He also serves on a Lutheran-Reformed Church dialogue on biblical authority in moral discernment.

About Linda McCrae

Linda McCrae is Senior Pastor of Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she has served since 2002. Previous to her present position, she worked with Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ and a missionary in Guatemala and a Global Mission Intern in Mexico. She also served as pastor of Wood Memorial Christian Church in Van Buren, Arkansas from 1997-2002. Linda is a graduate of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut and Union Theological Seminary in New York, New York.

Registration

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Additional Information

Additional information can be found on our website at www.transformingthechurch.org.