



ASHES AND THE PHOENIX

MEDITATIONS FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

LEN FREEMAN

WITH: CYNTHIA CANNON • MARY COX • JASON LEO • TERESA PASQUALE MATEUS
C.X. ROBERTSON • GLENICE ROBINSON-COMO • PORTER TAYLOR • ART BY: JASON SIERRA

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The collects (prayers) for the weeks of Lent and for the days of Holy Week can be found in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

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Movement

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Poetry by Len Freeman

with Cynthia Cannon, Mary W. Cox, Jason Leo,
Teresa Pasquale Mateus, C. K. Robertson,
Glenice Robinson-Como, and Porter Taylor

Woodcuts by Jason Sierra

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A Note to Readers

The meditations, poems, and artwork in *Ashes and the Phoenix: Meditations for the Season of Lent* offer many paths for you to walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem. The meditations from noted authors and faithful pilgrims may speak to your heart. The poetry may stir you, and the original artwork move you. Or perhaps you will connect most strongly with the collects. It may be tempting to focus on only one component of this book. But as is a custom during Lent, we encourage you not to give into temptation. See and experience this book as a companion—a kind of field guide through the wilderness and wildness of the season.

Engage *Ashes and the Phoenix* in different ways: the collects from *The Book of Common Prayer* and related woodcuts

inspired by the gospels; the daily meditations; the original poems for each day. We left blank space around the poems and throughout the book, as well as a few pages at the end so that, if inspired, you can write your own travel log, all season long. We love the idea of you composing poems or collects in the margins, making notes about the meditations, captioning the artwork as you make your pilgrimage from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday.

This is your book—use it in any and every way that meets your spiritual needs and goals. Should you desire to write a collect, the formula is pretty simple: address God by whatever name works best for you, follow it with an attribute of God that you particularly want to focus your prayer around, and proceed to the petition or praise aspect of your prayer. Then end with an expression of thanksgiving. In the introduction, poet Len Freeman offers helpful suggestions to encourage writing poetry. And we commend to you the personal and theologically insightful meditations as models for writing your own responses.

God bless you on your journey through a holy Lent.

RACHEL JONES, EDITOR

A Word of Introduction

The poem-prayers in this book came over the course of one Lenten season as expressions of my own soul's journey. But they also came as words back to me. I believe that the poetic voice is one of the ways God speaks to us from the inside to say, "Hello there!" and guide us on the way.

One of the hopes of this book is that you might be encouraged to write your own poetry or engage in some other creative expression as part of your own conversation with God during this Lenten season.

Writing poetry is not about meeting some particular academic form or standard. Crafting a poem is about letting your heart get out ahead of your head and allowing the words to flow, trusting that your "down deep" has something to tell you, something to say. The connection to that deep self (that silly

self, that playful self) comes from the heart of God, and this is why what comes out of our soul's deep well is sometimes a word of God, from God.

Prayer is a way of communicating with God, involving both parties sending and receiving all sorts of information. We focus a lot on the part where we send information to God, working on perfecting our messages. The sending part of prayer often comes down to some variation of help, thank you, or oops. Most of us need some work on tuning into the receiving part—the part where we listen to and receive the word of God.

Poetry turns out to be one of those avenues where sending and receiving can come together. We can let our hearts and minds flow out in words and then step back to see what God has to say to us.

One of the things that helped me send and receive in the poetry of prayer was a commitment I made several years ago to take a walk and to write a poem every day. The nice thing about writing a new poem every day is that I know I'm not trying to write grand epics like *Evangeline* or *Thanatopsis*. Writing every day frees me up to not have to be perfect. I just write one poem. One. And I don't sweat it. I move on. Or let it be. My suspicion is that this method can work for most people, and I encourage you to try it as you move through Lent with Jesus and this book as your companions.

What form to follow? If you can rhyme, (*I think that I shall never see a thing as lovely as a tree*) fine. But poems are not obliged to rhyme. Part of writing poetry is letting the words

come to you without forcing them into a particular set form. Try writing something simple—a thought that comes out in three or four short lines. Play with your verse by having the final line be just one word. Or having each line be shorter than the last or capitalize first lines, or not—just do something to push the words around on the page and to push your brain to see something new in the words. See what naturally comes. And don't worry if the poems are long or short, or all the same or each one different. These are yours, and they are just what they need to be.

Finding a time and place to help you feel encouraged and inspired to write are important to your exercise. The green chair in our bedroom is a natural place for me to sit with my laptop at the end of a day to do my writing. The advantage to end-of-day writing is that I have plenty of images, phrases, and moments from the day for inspiration.

Writing just a single word, just putting pen to paper. Eking out a phrase or describing an image—that's how I usually start. C.S. Lewis's entire *Chronicles of Narnia* came out of an image he had in his head of a lamppost in a patch of woods. Everyday life can provide a lot of grist for the mill. You may also find it helpful to have a source to bounce your poems off each day. For the poem-prayers in this book I used the collects for Lent, the readings for the saints' days, and the Great Litany, all of which can be found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. You could also use your Facebook feed or the collection of fortunes from your favorite Chinese restaurant—something to inspire or encourage you.

Whatever your nudge is, wherever your writing place is, whatever time of day you choose to do it, go with it. Stay with it. See where it takes you. And then, step back and see what God has had to say back to you in the doing.

Blessings,

Len Freeman



THE WEEK OF ASH WEDNESDAY

Worthily Lamenting Our Sins

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

ASH WEDNESDAY

“Ashes! Ashes! We all fall down!” For centuries, children have sung variations of the song “Ring Around the Roses.” There is no certain history behind this macabre childhood song, and the line “Ashes, ashes, we all fall down” seems strange and abrupt for a nursery rhyme. While we may not have a clear explanation of the origin or meaning of the lyrics, we know that in the biblical context, ashes represent sorrow and repentance. Ashes serve as a sign that we are formed from dust, and it is to dust that we are most assuredly going.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, reminding us of our mortality and humanity. During this season, we are called to develop spiritual disciplines, recognize our wrongdoings, and accept that in the midst of this life, we fall down.

Our fallings and failings are not the totality of our story, nor do they signal the end of God’s loving presence and providential activity in our lives. It is in the fallen, cratered-out spaces of our lives that we are most deeply reminded of a loving God who always offers us a way out of the ashes and into new life. In these collapsed voids, we are invited to find strength in weakness and hope in despair. Within the ashes, God’s love steadfastly abides, transforming our broken lives into overflowing vessels of service—mended and made whole. On this Ash Wednesday,

may we release the sins of the past to unveil our deepest fears, our failings, and the ways we fall down. May we remember God is mighty, able to exchange our ashes for crowns of beauty, the oil of joy for our mourning, and garments of praise for our despair.

—GLENICE ROBINSON-COMO



*Ashes speak to me
of what matters and
what does not.*

*Remind me of the heart
of my heart and that I
and the ones I love
are more than what
will dribble into the
ground.*

*May I be thankful
that I await not just
the ashes
but the Phoenix.*



THE FIRST WEEK IN LENT

Mighty To Save

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan: Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE POET



LEONARD FREEMAN recommends writing a poem and taking a walk every day for a disciplined, balanced life. A retired Episcopal priest and journalist, Len has worked at Trinity Wall Street and Washington National Cathedral, along with several other wonderful parishes.

He has published a number of works over the years, including video series, film, and media reviews. His most recent poetry offerings, *Hawai'i: Poems from a Promised Land* and *Safe in a Tree, Imara and Me*, are available from Amazon.com. Along with his wife Lindsay, Len has written *Good Lord, Deliver Us*, published by Forward Movement.

THE ARTIST



JASON SIERRA is a designer and visual artist based in Washington, D.C. His art brings together Christian symbols, Mexican-American folk art, and a post-colonial worldview. He works in management consulting for the Boston Consulting Group and spends his weekends making things.

THE CONTRIBUTORS



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JASON LEO is an Episcopal priest and serves as missionary for congregational vitality for the Diocese of Southern Ohio. His vocational career has carried him across oceans, up mountainsides, and all the way back home to the Ohio Valley, where he makes his home with his wife and their three children. Jason is an enthusiastic contributor to Forward Movement resources.



GLENICE ROBINSON-COMO serves as canon pastor of Christ Church Cathedral in Dallas, Texas. A native Virginian, she received an M.Div. from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University and a diploma of theological studies from the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest. She worked as a staff ombudsman with the Houston-Galveston Area Agency on Aging for ten years, in contract administration with the Department of Defense, and with the Metropolitan Transit Authority in Southern California. Glenice is the chair of the Commission on Black Ministry, a member of the diversity committee at the Seminary of the Southwest, a board member of Amazing Place, and a trained facilitator for Veriditas labyrinths. She and her husband have two children.



C. K. ROBERTSON serves as canon to the presiding bishop of The Episcopal Church and as a distinguished visiting professor at General Theological Seminary in New York City. A member of the Council of Foreign Relations, he also serves on the board of the *Anglican Theological Review* and is general editor of the *Studies in Episcopal and Anglican Theology* series. Chuck has authored more than a dozen books (www.ckrobertson.com) and was featured in Forward Movement's *Abiding with God Day by Day*.



TERESA PASQUALE MATEUS wears many hats, including author, trauma specialist, educator, trainer, yoga teacher, and a meditation and retreat facilitator. She advocates on behalf of women who have been victims of violence and marginalized people and works in a variety of ways to address these issues, including participation and leadership related to organizations such as TransFORM Missional Network, Wild Goose Festival, and Episcopal Peace Fellowship. She also was a leader in developing the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. She is founder and co-curator of the Voices Out of Darkness initiative and annual gathering to bring awareness and support around issues of addiction, trauma, and suicide. She has previously contributed to *Abiding with God Day by Day*, published by Forward Movement.



PORTER TAYLOR retired as the sixth bishop of the Diocese of Western North Carolina in 2016. In the fall of 2017 he will join the faculty of the Wake Forest University School of Divinity. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1994 and was consecrated as bishop in 2004—the 999th bishop to have been consecrated in The Episcopal Church. Porter leads retreats and is the author of *To Dream as God Dreams: Sermons of Hope, Conversion, and Community* and *From Anger to Zion: An Alphabet of Faith*. He and his wife Jo have two children. They currently make their home in North Carolina.



CYNTHIA CANNON is the executive director for the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes. Prior to her work with the consortium, she worked at Lawrence Hall Youth Services, the largest child welfare agency in the state of Illinois. Before coming to Lawrence Hall, she worked for Episcopal Charities and Community Services in Chicago where she coordinated special events and publications. Cynthia has an extensive background in writing, event planning, and association management. Cynthia and her husband and their three cats live happily in a Victorian home in San Antonio, Texas.

ABOUT FORWARD MOVEMENT

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Our mission is to support you in your spiritual journey, to help you grow as a follower of Jesus Christ. Publishing books, daily reflections, studies for small groups, and online resources is an important way that we live out this ministry. More than a half million people read our daily devotions through *Forward Day by Day*, which is also available in Spanish (*Adelante Día a Día*) and Braille, online, as a podcast, and as an app for your smartphones or tablets. It is mailed to more than fifty countries, and we donate nearly 30,000 copies each quarter to prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes. We actively seek partners across the Church and look for ways to provide resources that inspire and challenge.

A ministry of The Episcopal Church for eighty years, Forward Movement is a nonprofit organization funded by sales of resources and gifts from generous donors. To learn more about Forward Movement and our resources, please visit us at ForwardMovement.org (or VenAdelante.org).

We are delighted to be doing this work and invite your prayers and support.



ASHES AND THE PHOENIX features faithful and challenging reflections for the season of Lent. Anchored by the stunningly visual and visceral poems of Len Freeman and guided by the collects for Lent and Holy Week, *Ashes and the Phoenix* leads us through the emotions, symbols, sights, sounds, and scents of Lent. Featuring original woodcuts by artist Jason Sierra, this book is a feast for hungry hearts and weary eyes.

If you are seeking a way to answer the Church's invitation to observe a holy Lent, *Ashes and the Phoenix* is an excellent companion for your journey.



“Here is a Lenten path to follow, with beautifully crafted words that will lead you to deep insight and discovery.”

—STEVEN CHARLESTON
BISHOP IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH,
AND CITIZEN IN THE CHOCTAW NATION

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