

# LENT

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# WAY



Daily Navigations and Motivations  
for Teens and Young Adults

— Ash Wednesday —

## SET TO SAIL ... WITHOUT A BOAT!

When Cortés landed on the shores of Mexico, it is said that he burned his ships. He did it as a sign to his men that retreat wasn't an option. No going back. No "Plan B." It was succeed or die. Forward movement only.

And while I'm not too comfortable using a character as morally questionable as Hernando Cortés as a good example, there is something about the ashes of those ships of his that calls to mind these Ash Wednesday ashes that confront us at the beginning of Lent each year.

First of all, for all intents and purposes, Cortés' story really *began* with those ashes. When the boats burned, that's when his fate was sealed.

The same is true of us this Lent. Lent begins with ashes. They are the ashes promised (or is it "threatened?") by God in Genesis 3. "You are *dust*," he told his sinful children, Adam and Eve. "And to dust you shall return." "Ashes to ashes," we say at many funerals. "Dust to dust." We begin Lent with a reminder of death. Your death ... and mine. *We are dust.* That's harsh!

There is no going back for us. Adam and Eve found that to be true, that's for sure. No return to Eden. No paradise ...

... forward movement only. Which would be scary if we didn't have a leader who knew where he was going. God has charted a course—a plan for our salvation. God's even sent a Navigator, Jesus, to guide us through Lent.

It's good that somebody has a plan for this nautical trip through Lent. Because the ashes on our foreheads mean that we don't even have a *boat*!



Thursday

## I DIDN'T THINK CHAOS WOULD BE SO SOGGY

Yesterday dealt with Adam and Eve, which I realized may be jumping the gun. What led up to our Lenten excursion started before the events with Adam and Eve and the threat of dusty ashes. It started at ... well, the BEGINNING. THE beginning. I'm talking Genesis 1, here.

The beginning of the Bible reminds me of the movie "The Perfect Storm," the one where an earnest Mark Wahlberg drowns in the turbulent swells of the Northern Atlantic.

In the first verses of Genesis, the chaos that existed before "The Beginning" is described as being WATERY. Which makes sense, especially if you've seen "The Perfect Storm" or any stormy sea, for that matter. A hurricane sums up any image of "chaos" that my imagination can muster.

Today, just think about chaos. (Maybe even chaotic periods in your own life). Doesn't it feel like a stormy, unsailable sea? How so, specifically?

Friday

## THE ULTIMATE GRUDGE MATCH

You've been thinking about chaos. And that's more than a bit of a bummer. So it's time for me to remind you of some GOOD news. The very first words of the Bible are "In the beginning, GOD ..."

Oh, chaos is there, true enough. But GOD is there, too. Let's see—if we put God and chaos up against each other, who do you think will win? That's important information to remember during the days of Lent and every day: God trumps chaos every time. No contest!

— Saturday —

## GENTLE BREEZES OVER STORMY SEAS

In several translations, Genesis 1:2 tells us, “The Spirit of God brooded over the waters.”

I like that word “brooded.” It sounds a little haunting, I guess. But mostly it sounds calming.

Especially when I imagine the Spirit of God (and the word “spirit” in the Bible is the same word as the word “wind,” or “breath”) brooding atop that turbulent chaotic sea.

A stormy sea would, by its very nature, be accompanied by a wildly whipping wind—something stirring up that chaos.

But God’s Spirit-Wind is doing the opposite. It’s pondering—**BROODING**. One of the very first images the Bible gives us to wrap our minds around is the image of gentle breezes over stormy seas. **GENTLE** breezes. **GOD’S** gentle breezes.

This is our introduction to God. In the very next verse God will start bellowing things like “**LIGHT!**” and “**LAND!**” and “**LIFE!**” But before we get to all that shouting we encounter a God of gentle breezes.

And if, as conventional wisdom insists, “first impressions are lasting,” well, God’s left a pretty awesome first impression.

— First Sunday in Lent —

## THE GREAT SEA-TAMER

It’s important to remember that the Bible is full of “**THEMES**.” Stories and topics and issues that come back again and again throughout Scripture, hammering home some great truth. The very first theme in the Bible is that God is a great tamer of seas. Can you think, already, of other times when this theme will come up?

Monday

# A DOME ON A MOUND ON A SEA ON A TURTLE?

It's time for a brief lesson on ancient Middle-Eastern cosmology. I know, I know. You're busting your buttons to learn about such a fascinating topic. So I won't hold you in suspense. Let's dive right in, shall we?

If I were to ask you to describe the cosmos, you would spin tales of spherical planets, protective atmospheres, nuclear-powered suns and swirling galaxies. All of it, you would insist, exists within the vast and icy vacuum of something you call "SPACE."

However, if I were to ask an ancient Middle Easterner (someone like Abraham, for example) the same question, they would describe for me a cosmos that consists of a vast concave dome called the "sky" which rests like an enormous bowl over a huge convex plate called the "land." This land in turn, is perched atop giant "pillars" which rest, quite logically, upon the shell of an enormous sleeping TURTLE.

All of this—the dome, the earth, the pillars and the turtle—are completely surrounded not by your "SPACE," but by the vast, swirling WATER of chaos, called "The DEEP." Which only stands to reason! Does SPACE fall out of the sky when it springs a leak? Of course not! WATER does. And when you dig down into the earth, do you hit your strange concept of "MAGMA"? I've never done so. I've hit WATER!

Why else would Abraham be so impressed with God? The Almighty is the One who keeps all the WATER tamed after all! Pretty impressive God!



— Tuesday —

# OUT OF THE HARBOR, INTO THE RAGING SEA

So, God is the great Sea-Tamer. Which probably makes the Garden of Eden God's ultimate harbor: a safe, protected, glossy-watered port of call. Paradise (from a sailor's point of view, anyway).

From that same point of view, the incident in the Garden with Adam and Eve and the Snake—the fall into Sin; the resulting expulsion from Eden—all of these amount to no less than sailing out of an idyllic lagoon into the turbulent waters of a raging sea ... and then being barred from re-entering the harbor by the Harbor Master ...

... without a BOAT!

I'm feeling a lot more like that Mark Wahlberg character at the end of *The Perfect Storm*. Or like Leonardo DiCaprio at the end of *Titanic*. Or like the abandoned couple in *Open Water*. And that's not a good feeling.

Fancy theologians call that feeling something like "total depravity." That's a cryptic way of saying that we're far from God and there's nothing we can do about it. We're "born in sin," they say. Or we're "in bondage to sin."

For now, maybe it's better (and more accurate, even) to imagine ourselves out on a raging sea. The sun is setting. The water is icy. The sharks are circling. And we're boatless.

This whole "Navigating Lent" thing isn't going very well.



Wednesday

## OPTION ONE: GET HIT BY A BIG WAVE

So, we're out in the open sea. It's raging. The sharks are circling. Oh, and did I mention the TIDAL WAVE?!?

You heard me. That's what a verse like "the wages of sin is DEATH" means. This isn't going to end well. It's simply going to END. At the grave.

I know this isn't a comfortable thing to do, and I don't make the suggestion lightly. Still, think about death today. Your own. If you had no hope, how would confronting your own death feel?

The good news is that you DO have hope. You have options. The bad news is that option one is getting totaled by the big wave.

Thursday

## OPTION TWO: ACCEPT GOD'S SURFBOARD

The other option is to accept God's surfboard.

Which is, I guess you could say, what Noah did.

Sin had spun out of control. Adam's son, Cain, killed his other son, Abel, for starters. And things went downhill from there. God decided to destroy the world in a way that suited his standing as the great Sea-Tamer. By UN-TAMING the forces of "The Deep" (that's exactly the image in Genesis 7 gives us—go ahead and read it: The waters from above the firmament and from below the earth were all "unleashed").

But Noah was given an option: To build an ark. To accept God's surfboard in the face of the tidal wave. Kind of a no-brainer. Don't you think?

— Easter Sunday —

## NAVIGATING LIFE!

So are you surprised? Surprised that it's not over? Oh, the booklet is. And Lent, for this year at least, is over too.

But "navigating" isn't over. It continues. And even though it's Easter Sunday—the day on which our great Sea-Tamer, Jesus, proclaims victory in taming sin and death forever—chaos isn't over either. That surprises many people who can't comprehend how a good and loving God can allow chaos to continue in the world. "Why do we still NEED to navigate?" they ask. "Shouldn't life be a self-guided pleasure cruise?"

Don't be so surprised. Because what we're navigating now is LIFE! Not Lent. Not chaos. But LIFE. Jesus did that! He charted a new course for us. He is the WAY toward life—ETERNAL LIFE.

So toward that end we continue to navigate, remembering the whole time that this is no mere pleasure cruise. It's a FISHING trip. We're fishing for folks to join us, hauling them on board and heading toward our final port.

I'll see you there!

