

***Sunday by Sunday* on the web**

Worship during Lent

The *Times and Seasons* volume in the *Common Worship* series, prepared by the Church of England's Liturgical Commission, was published in 2006. David Kennedy, Canon Precentor of Durham Cathedral, shared in the revision of seasonal material; his reflections on the *Common Worship* liturgy for Lent offer pointers which will also assist those using other liturgical resources.

"Welcome, dear feast of Lent..."

So begins George Herbert's well-known poem. But Lent can be a difficult time for musicians, not least because of a long-established tradition that during this season music is restrained and traditional elements such as the 'Gloria in excelsis' and all 'Alleluias' are suppressed. There is a fear that in many places Lenten worship is simply colourless and drab. But this misses the point; Lent has a distinctive atmosphere and feel, not only as a contrast to the glories of Eastertide but also as a means of balance within the celebration of the liturgical year.

It is worth remembering, as the Liturgy for Ash Wednesday makes clear, that Lent is essentially an extended period of preparation for the festival of Easter. Preparing well provides great opportunities for all worship leaders and musicians. Indeed, Lent has many appropriate spiritualities and associated themes to help us to prepare:

- the meaning of the Cross
- the excitement and the cost of discipleship
- the need for true repentance and the miracle of forgiveness
- the invitation to grow in holiness
- exploration of the life of prayer

Or, there may be themes relevant to particular parishes:

- the final preparation of candidates for baptism and confirmation
- Christian stewardship, as almsgiving is a great Lenten theme
- issues of justice and peace, as many communities hold Lenten lunches and support aid agencies and charities.
- Christian mission, as Lent traditionally is a time of giving to mission societies through Lent boxes.
- issues arising from a parish Lent course or special sermon series.

Some of these themes are more prominently represented than others in contemporary hymn books and song books. However, it is a good discipline to 'give up' (to use a good Lenten phrase) the more triumphant and proclamatory style, which after all will find full expression in Eastertide, and to trawl our musical resources to find suitable forms of musical expression.

Lent itself has a particular rhythm. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the season and is a day of repentance and turning to the Lord. Lent 1 traditionally commemorates the temptations of Jesus (and so gives a better liturgical setting for the hymn 'Forty days and forty nights' than Ash Wednesday). From Lent 3, the collects begin to point more directly towards the Cross and this should be reflected musically. Lent 4 is also Mothering Sunday and churches need to consider how to handle that liturgically. Lent 5 marks the beginning of Passiontide and a significant gear change as the liturgy focusses directly on the Cross.

As the Gloria is not sung at the Eucharist, it is worth thinking how the Kyries might be used. The *Common Worship* main volume (pages 133-134, 277-278), *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* (page 213), and *New Patterns for Worship* (Church House Publishing 2002, pages 91-94) give a series of suitable texts for 'Kyrie Confessions'. Simple sung Kyries from Taizé and Iona, or the Russian Kyrie (found, for example, in the RSCM's resource book for *Common Worship*) work well, along with those provided by particular Mass settings. Alternatively, a litany-style of intercession with the sung response 'Lord, have mercy/Kyrie eleison' complements the use of the Kyries in the prayers of penitence. A sung Kyrie can also be used as the congregational response to the Ten Commandments, Summary of the Law or the Beatitudes (see the main volume of *Common Worship*, pages 162-164), or with the bank of penitential material in 'A Corporate Service of Penitence' (see *Common Worship: Initiation Services*, pages 242-251).

Simple hymns or songs such as 'Jesu, grant me this, I pray', or 'Purify my heart' can be used immediately before the general confession. This would give the sequence:

Invitation to confession
Silence
Hymn or song
Kyrie confession (sung response) or general
confession Absolution

Settings for the Lenten Gospel Acclamation are appearing in Anglican and Roman Catholic sources, as are settings for the acclamations in the eucharistic prayer.

A simple hymn or song such as 'O dearest Lord', or 'There is a Redeemer' makes a very appropriate post-communion song for each week in Lent. Indeed, the section 'Prayers at the foot of the Cross' from *Common Worship: Daily Prayer* (Church House Publishing 2002, pages 283-284) can be adapted as a post-communion devotion or as the conclusion to A Service of the Word. This gives the possibility, where appropriate and feasible, for congregations to move to a particular part of the Church building for the conclusion of the rite, and may include suitable sung devotional material.

Lenten worship also should include plenty of time for silence and reflection. Well chosen organ or instrumental music within an act of worship can greatly enhance this. Suitable points in the service include: after the sermon, after prayer biddings, during the preparation of the Table, and during and after the administration of Communion.

Finally *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* includes 'The Way of the Cross' (pages 236-256), a version of the popular devotion 'Stations of the Cross' but entirely drawn from the Gospel passion narratives. Note 5 (page 237) makes provision for music. One possibility is to select a series of stations, say six or seven, and use appropriate music at each, as a form of processional corporate worship. The RSCM has produced one such resource, *The Way of the Cross: A Passiontide Sequence* (compiled by David Ogden and Peter Moger).

David Kennedy

All the *Common Worship* texts to which this article refers are also freely available online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship.aspx>