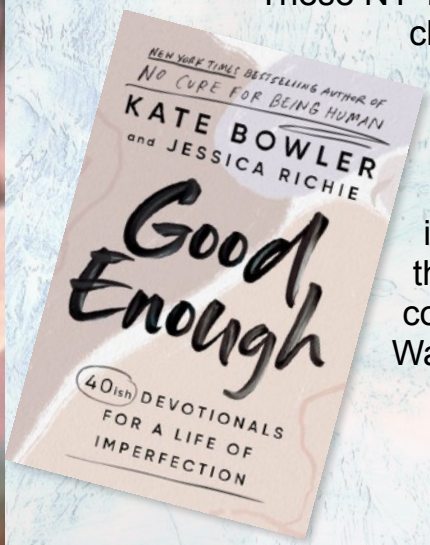


Overview of the Worship Scripts from Dr. Marcia McFee



Meet Kate Bowler (www.katebowler.com), seminary history professor, author and podcaster, and "incurable optimist." Her research focuses on a topic about which I never thought I'd find myself making a worship series–the "prosperity gospel" movement whose development spans centuries and has contributed, fascinatingly, to our current moment's "self-help" craze. I became interested in Bowler's research because she's had a couple of bestsellers lately: *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*, and *No Cure for Being Human (And Other Truths I Need to Hear).*



These NY Times bestsellers chronicle her life as a young person living with stage four colon cancer, discovering she had fallen into the same trap her research is about: the belief that we can all "bootstrap" ourselves into a perfect life. Sound familiar? This idea is so baked into our consciousness that sometimes we think God requires this perfection of us and we end up falling continually short. Check out this excerpt from her recent Washington Post Opinion piece:

"Every year, billions of dollars are pumped into a wellness industry defined by the theory that we can be perfected. We can organize ourselves, heal ourselves, budget ourselves, love ourselves, track ourselves and eat well enough to make ourselves whole. In the 1970s, a New Age strain of America's famous self-confidence took hold of the boomer counterculture. Its promises were bold and metaphysical, insisting that the mind could overcome the sins of the therapeutic age: low self-esteem, mediocrity and a ho-hum existence.

…The American admiration for bootstrappers and optimists had become a capitalist paradise. Everyone was now an evangelist of good, better, best. Harness your mind to change your circumstances. Salvation is only a decision away.

But I cannot outwork or outpace or out-pray my cancer. I can't dispel it with a can-do attitude.

After a diagnosis. After a pandemic. That is the right time to question our popular theories about how to build a better life. We cannot "have it all" if we just learn how to conquer our limits. Infinity isn't at the bottom of your inbox or in the next level on the Peloton. The problem with our lives is that we cannot solve them. We can only live them." - Kate Bowler

[Opinion | We can't upgrade our lives. We can only live them. - The Washington Post 11/1/21, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/09/24/we-cant-upgrade-our-lives-we-can-only-live-them]

This worship series invites us to "take a page" from Kate's research and take seriously, and with humility, that most often life is imperfect. When I discovered that she and her writing and producing partner, Jessica Richie, were coming out with a series of devotions in time for Lent, I contacted their team and publisher right away to suggest a worship series to go with it. **I believe it is the Lent message we need to hear, especially this year.** As I write this we are bracing for another surge of coronavirus. We are still in the midst of great disturbance from "the way we imagined" life to be. In many cases, dreams have been thwarted by pandemic through loss of life, health, and economic security. And then there's all the other hard stuff, unrelated to pandemic, that just keeps rollin' along. My prayer is that this resource–both the worship series and the book–will be salve for our frustrated selves, inviting us to embrace the imperfections of life and faith, knowing that we are never alone.

And so I invite you to consider a Lent Season of "Good Enough," embracing the imperfections of life and faith. As I worked with the scriptures from the Revised Common Lectionary for Lent 2022, I was amazed at how much these Gospel stories lure us lovingly into this territory of accepting our incurable humanity. The Good News certainly is that God loves us deeply and is present to us powerfully, even and especially in the midst of the imperfect and down-right crappy moments of life.

This Overview will give you a sense of what are in the downloadable materials and the rhythms and content of the Order of Worship. In this moment of unprecedented change, I will also be encouraging you to invite people not only to worship, but to individual devotion and small groups where we can break and share our lives as well as engage in activities that offer practices of embracing our “good enough” humanity together. So I encourage you to be active on the Worship Design Studio website where churches are working collaboratively, sharing resources and ideas about how to move forward in such an uncertain time.

Friends, I fervently and frequently pray that the Spirit fills you with strength, endurance, inspiration, rest, and uncanny and unexplained resilience for your lives and for your worshiping. I hope that these resources will help you, relieve you, and inspire you for your Lenten preparations. Thank you for all you are, all you do, all you are holding in this time.

Peace & Passion,

Dr. Marcia McFee



Downloads
What's included and what to do with it

This Overview - have your whole team read this to get a good foothold on the theme and order

Scriptures and Synopses - this is your at-a-glance look at the movement of the series and the scriptures highlighted from the RCL

Ten Worship Scripts - you WILL adapt these for your context (tip: do this in one fell swoop before the season begins and you'll feel amazingly prepared and your team will thank you). Includes a Communion Script to adapt and include in any week.

Children's Time Scripts - decide who is doing this and get it into their hands early so they can have fun with it, adapt it, and connect it to what children are doing in other settings like education

Sermon Fodder - scan it pre-season so you know what is there then use it to help jumpstart your own sermon preparation each week

Visual and Media Ideas - make some time early in your planning process to go through the ideas with your team and land on how you'll apply the main images to your space then get folx working on it (the earlier, the more fun they'll have)

Music Documents and Files - there are two original songs that repeat weekly ("thread items") so have your musicians try it out (or decide to use the recordings) and then get together to actually try them out as you adapt the scripts for your context

Logo and Trailer - put your own branding on these early (directions in the Visual and Media Ideas doc) so you can begin to get the word out pre-season



Small Group Suggestions - take a look at this document to decide how you will encourage people to encounter the devotional book, *Good Enough: 40'ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection* (coming out Feb. 15, 2022), and if you also want to utilize some of Kate Bowler's other books

Sustaining Our World by Celebrating Imperfection - ideas to promote the use of imperfect and used items for the good of the environment and those in need

Get-Ready Webinar - plan to attend or watch the recording of this session in which I talk about the resources and how to adapt them as you get ready for a deeply meaningful season

Order of Worship

This series is designed to give you everything you need–all words, hymn and song suggestions, anthem and band/soloist suggestions, leader introductions, etc. But also please know that if you want to adapt to fit your current order of worship, you can easily lift any of the suggested material out of my scripts and place it in your more familiar structure.

The order of worship is the same each week. This goes with the concept I teach that repetition is a good thing and a solid foundation is necessary in order to be creative within it. Doing series can give you the opportunity to try on a slightly different order of worship or a different way of doing an element of the service for a season but keep it the same during that season, therefore offering some sense of familiarity and a rhythm. All of our series are based on the traditional four-fold Christian order of worship: Gather, Proclaim, Respond, Send Forth. I have included a communion prayer separately from the scripts so you can fit that in whenever you have communion. If you do communion weekly, adapt by using that script as a model for how you might edit according to the theme each week. As always, adapt the communion prayer to fit your tradition.

The "Anchor Image" (main metaphor) for the series is a repurposed ladder with plants on it. You will hear this image referenced in the liturgy, inviting us to nurture what actually is, not continually climb the ladder of success to some expectation of nirvana. See the Visuals and Media document for ideas about adding this item to your worship setting to highlight this theme's messages and spiritual metaphors.

Music for Gathering (Prelude) and Welcome

In this series, the children are featured as a procession in the Threshold Moment (see next paragraph). They bring various items to the front (depending on the message for the day) to add to the ladder-garden visual installation. So send them to the back to get organized during the Welcome/Greeting (of course if you do not have children's time, or are going to adapt the scripts to put the children's time in a different place in the order, you will disregard this direction).

Threshold

This concept of a "threshold moment" that I teach introduces people to the journey and the theme of the day at the beginning of the service so that every part of the service is seen through that thematic lens. I have created some of the elements that Worship Design Studio churches have come to know well: spoken introduction of the theme for the day and a theme song during which acolytes and children can process. The theme song, "Good Enough," is a collaboration with my friends Marsha Charles and Chuck Bell. The congregation will learn it easily (and we have melody lines to include in your

worship guide). We are including recordings (with vocals and without) for churches that need that kind of help. Here are the lyrics:

What in our lives do we dream about for tomorrow, void of sorrow?
Time spent regretting decisions of our yesterdays, mistakes we made?
Sometimes we get what we get,
life disappoints us and yet,
God is still here and somehow, this faith is good enough.

Calling on God

This short unison prayer utilizes the Psalm selection from the RCL Year C for the week. It is a version of the "collect prayer" format, describing God's nature and asking for God's presence and help, underscoring the message for the day.

The Children Lead Us

The Children's Time in this series really helps introduce the message for the day, hence, the title "the children lead us." And if there are models for letting go of imperfection, it is children! This element is a bit earlier in the order of worship than is usual with my series, but I loved the interactivity of the idea of having the children add to the ladder-garden and processing in our midst. And we don't necessarily want them to have to stay up front through an entire opening hymn so we have a short time with the children at this point, and then they go out or back to their seats in the following Opening Hymn. Of course, at the time of this writing and continuing coronavirus variants, you may still be having children stay in their seats and that will work just fine as well. You might consider having a family unit or solo child bring something up during the Threshold in that case. Again, adaptation is the name of the game!

Opening Hymn/Song

We have chosen hymns (for more "traditional/classic" worship) and songs (for more "modern/contemporary" worship) as suggestions. But you can also feel free to adapt our suggestions if you choose. Just look at the hymns/songs we have chosen and try to find something that keeps the "essence of the message" but is something more beloved by your congregation. Here is the key to the abbreviations of songbooks we use:

GTG (Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA)
ELW (Evangelical Lutheran Worship)
UMH (United Methodist Hymnal, UMC)
NCH (New Century Hymnal, UCC)
Chalice (Chalice Hymnal, DOC)
VU (Voices United, United Church of Canada)
VT (Voices Together, Mennonite Church USA/Canada)

FWS/STF (Faith We Sing/Sing the Faith, UMC, PCUSA)
W&S = Worship & Song (UMC)
W&R = Worship & Rejoice!
SP&P = Sing Prayer and Praise
MV = More Voices
URW = Upper Room Worshipbook
CMP = Convergence Music Project
Songselect (the database of CCLI)

You will find that in either the Opening or Closing Hymn slot for each service, I have chosen a text by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. Carolyn is a gifted poet whose texts bring scripture to life beautifully. They are all set to familiar hymn tunes so it is a perfect combination of delightful new words with old tunes.

Honest Questions, Compassionate Response

The title of this section is simply another way to say "Confession and Assurance." I like to use different words for traditional titles to express a nuance in the way we are approaching the liturgical season. A series about a "good enough" life and faith includes questioning assumptions, being honest about our interior "self-speak," and then hearing the Voice of Compassion that says, "you are beloved and blessed, no matter what." A leader invites the honest question for the week through a weekly synopsis I have written about the connection to the Gospel reading (see the document "Synopses and Scriptures" for the series). Then a brief time of silent reflection ensues, followed by a compassionate response from the Hebrew or Epistle lection for the week. If you need a more traditional confession/assurance, I invite you to adapt, perhaps weaving some of my verbiage into your format.

The Peace

The compassionate response extends through passing the peace with one another in a manner to which your folx are accustomed (still a good idea perhaps to stay distanced with a "wave" or peace sign in this moment of lingering pandemic).

First Reading

This series utilizes the readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C. The Second Reading is always the Gospel lection so this first reading is "preacher's choice," depending on what other scripture might be highlighted in the sermon. Or you might decide to include a contemporary reading such as a poem or excerpt from one of Kate's books.

The Word in Music

As with congregational song selections, we offer a classical/traditional choral option as well as a soloist/band-style option. You may wish to listen to the suggestions we made in the scripts and decide if they suit your choir or band. As always, please choose from your existing repertoire if that makes your preparation more doable.

Second Reading

I have utilized the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translations in the worship scripts. Feel free to use other translations that you may prefer. As I mentioned above, this second reading is the Gospel selection.

Thoughts about an Imperfect Life and Faith (Sermon)

Each week there are notes in the Sermon Fodder document to help jumpstart your sermon preparation in relation to the Gospel text. Of course, another resource to draw from are the wonderful devotions from the book, *Good Enough,* that this series is based on. In the Small Group Suggestions Document, you will find a list of the devotions from that book that I believe address the particular message for each week. Read these the week before as you prepare your sermon, and you will have more than enough prompts and references that will deepen the congregation's experience of these devotions in the week following your sermon.

An important note: One of the "resources" you have at your disposal is the Worship Design Studio community of churches like yours who are active on the website and in the app. We create a prompt in the Series Resource (click on "Topics" in the left menu once you are in the Good Enough series) each week during Lent to get access to the wonderful discussion and sharing of ideas that happens during the week as preachers are working on their sermons. Such a wonderful bonus to being part of this resource!

Prayers of the People

The prayer song that is repeated each week is written by an evangelist who wrote in the 19th century, Daniel S. Warner, entitled "Good Enough for Me." Embracing a good enough life means also embracing the need for the ordinariness of all lives to be good enough–cared for enough, sheltered and fed enough, loved enough. As long as this is not true in this world, we pray and work for justice. Warner's first verse is followed by an adapted new second verse turning our attention to the needs of the world. I have written an introduction to prayer time that changes each week and is read in between the two verses. Then you are encouraged to continue the prayers in a way that feels familiar to your congregation.

Offering

I have left this part of the service open for you to do in the most familiar manner for your congregation, or in the adaptations you are currently using so as not to pass the plate during this continued time of pandemic. If you sing a Doxology and pray a prayer over the offering, I've written something for both, using the *Old 100th* tune and the metaphor of "transforming what we plant into the produce of love."

[Communion]

This is the place where you can insert the communion script I have written on the weeks when that is appropriate for your tradition. Again, please adapt what I have written (based largely on the ecumenical standard from 2nd century Hippolytus prayer) as needed to fit your tradition of the prayer before communion. If you commune weekly, you may want to adapt the language I have written to include references from that week's scripture or message. I have utilized the song "Take, O Take Me As I Am" by John Bell. You will need a OneLicense or CCLI license to use this, and you can also supplement the chorus with Bell's full choral Lent Mass version (link to purchase in the Communion document).

Closing Hymn/Song

Again, adapt as needed by looking at what I have chosen and determining if it feels like what I have chosen will work for your congregation. Most of the choices in this series involve generally familiar tunes.

A Blessing for…

Each week I have chosen a blessing from the *Good Enough* book of devotions that really brings home the message. Your folx will delight in hearing it in worship and then encountering it in their individual daily devotions that week. Any time we can make the connection between our corporate worship and our daily prayer, our love and care for the community is strengthened.

Benediction

The Benediction follows on the heels of the blessing and is the same every week, except for one phrase that changes according to the message for that week. Here is the first week:

And now, may the God who loves all of creation, especially the ordinary bits,
and Jesus, our companion along this crooked path called life,
and the Holy Spirit, who loves to improvise in surprising ways,
go with you, dwell among you, and give you joy. Amen.

Postlude

I hope this helps you get an at-a-glance feel for the scripts!

See the synopses for every worship experience in the series HERE

If you haven't purchased the series yet (free to WDS members), click HERE

If you'd like to get access to ALL our series, check out a Worship Design Studio subscription HERE