

## **Week 1: Practicing Emptying** **Additional Reflections for Leaders**

by Rev. Emily Meyer, Director of [The Ministry Lab](#)

Luke chapter 4, verse 1, begins with the words, “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit...”

Lots of experiences teach us that “full” is temporary: like filling our tummy at one meal, only to find that play and work, learning and growing, make our tummy empty so we need to eat again.

When something that was full becomes empty, we also learn that full and empty are opposites of one another. Our brains are wired to assume that, with opposites, one is “good” and the other is “bad”; in this case, “full” is good while “empty” is bad.

### ***Explore opposites...***

*With any age group, you might explore a list of “opposites” where we assume one is “good” and the other is “bad”. Younger ones might list things like: light/dark, easy/hard, light/heavy, etc. You might challenge youth and adults with lists such as male/female, light skin/dark skin, power/weakness, wealth/poverty, etc.*

Like most things that we label as “bad”, we avoid emptiness. Unfortunately, our favorite avoidance tactics are the same temptations Jesus overcame in our Bible story: in order to avoid feeling empty - physically, socially, emotionally, or spiritually - we tend to fill ourselves with food, or control, or safe-ness.

### ***Explore emptiness....***

*With all ages you can consider the real forms taken by both emptiness and the temptations/distractions used to fill that emptiness.*

*Where do you experience emptiness? [Loneliness, anger, frustration, grief, isolation, etc.]*

*What distractions or temptations do you use to fill that emptiness? [Screen time/gaming/binge watching, foods, taking control in harmful ways, etc.]*

Because avoiding emptiness is such a common human experience, we’ve created a season called “Lent”. Lent is a time to practice being empty. Being emptied helps us see through our “good” vs. “bad” thinking. Feeling empty reminds us to not stuff ourselves with the distractions that never really satisfy. Embracing emptiness helps us see that we are actually already full of the Divine.

### ***How will we fill up?***

*What practices will your congregation encourage this Lent? After a year of loss, many congregations are opting to forego foregoing things. That is, rather than focusing on what we can give up this Lent (having given up so many things in the past year), let the focus be on how we can re-fill with healthy, hopeful, inspiring practices/habits. Naming what has been lost/given*

*up, already, may be a good place to start. Brainstorming healthy ways of re-filling might give Lent a hopeful slant.*

*With older youth and adults, you might be able to pursue the following trains of thought:*

Being emptied in Lent makes room for this different kind of full. Both the RCL reading for this first Sunday in Lent ([Mark 1:9-15](#)) and our text for this week's Toolkit, ([Luke 4:1-13](#)) connect us to Jesus' baptism, and through that event, to our own baptismal promises. This connection reminds us that we are *always* full of the Holy Spirit, the Divine spark, the Mystery of God. And when we are connected to that fullness of the Spirit, that is when we live as our True Self, the Beloved Child of God we are created and baptized to be - just as "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit..." withstood enormous temptation following 40 days in the desert of isolation and deprivation (i.e., emptiness).

Most of us (humans, not just those who identify as "Christian") want and intend to be "good" people: we want to be kind, considerate, caring, etc. But we get distracted by so many things, things that feed our egos, that put/keep our own sense of self as the center of the universe, things that create walls between us and "others". In short, we get distracted by things that cause us to live as our false/little/small self, and not our True Self.

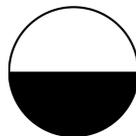
*How does perceived "emptiness" lead us to live as our ego-self, our small self? [Our fears and perceived "emptinesses" tempt us to act out in ego-centric, destructive, and unhealthy ways. We are not our True Self when we live in fear and act out of our ego-based concerns.]*

*How does practicing emptiness and embracing emptiness help us become more hopeful? [Practiced emptiness helps us see how full we are, and helps us notice when feelings of emptiness are tempting us to live in less healthy and hopeful ways.]*

*How might focusing on healthy habits and hopeful practices help us each live more into our True Self? Do we have a glimmer of our True Self? What does that person look like?*

*How does God see us? What practices can we develop that help us lean into/move toward/live more fully as our True Self?*

Lent is a season to be emptied in order to remember just how full we are.



*empty / full*