

Explanation about Lent (from Whitney's February Newsletter)

Even though we have been able to be back in the church building on a very limited basis, you can still see evidence that the last time we worshipped in the building, it was Lent. The windows still have the purple overlays on them, the hollow cross we were putting stones in, is still sitting there waiting for the rest of the stones. The stones themselves are still in the basket and the cards we were using are still sitting on the desk waiting to be used.

So it is a bit odd to realize that we are about to begin the Lenten journey again. Lent starts this year on February 17 and I wonder what this Lent will bring. Last year's Lenten journey truly felt truncated—like the end of it was cut off. Technically it wasn't. We still worshiped through Lent and made it through Holy Week to Easter. But the time that Lent usually gives us to ponder our humanity and our need for God, was usurped by a pandemic.

So this year, it feels even more important to honor and walk through this Lenten journey. It feels important to “observe a holy Lent: by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word.” (From the Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Disciplines used in the Ash Wednesday Service.) I would add a fourth piece to that—to observe a Holy Lent by self-sacrifice and service of love to others.

To even being to observe a holy Lent, we need to ponder what Lent even is.

Lent is the season of 40 days (not counting Sundays), which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday (the day before Easter). The word comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *lecten*, meaning “spring”.

But beyond just the facts of Lent, Lent is a journey of space and time. It is a holy time allotted to us to truly ponder who God is, who we are as human beings and our relationship with God. We often do not allow ourselves the time to truly ponder these things and especially our own human nature. Who has time for that and who wants to actually ponder our human nature?

But if any year has shown us the true value and desperate need for looking deep within us, it has been this year. It is a year that has brought out the best in us and the worst in us. We have seen the human capacity for love, kindness, compassion and seeking the good of our neighbors. But we have also been confronted up close and personal with the reminder of the human capacity for hate, racism, violence and only seeking what is best for me.

Lent offers us the space and time to really look within ourselves to see where these two parts of humanity intercept in us. Lent offers that time to be honest about our own tendencies toward behaviors that are not kind and compassionate. Lent gives us the space to seek God's forgiveness and God's guidance on how to be a bit more like Christ in our daily living.

How do we do this? How do we observe a Holy Lent?

With intention. The 40 days plus those 6 Sundays will come and go and nothing will change within us unless we are intentional about observing this holy Lent. If we are intentional about being part of this journey of time and space to look within and to see where we need God's forgiveness, we will find at the end that it was indeed a holy lent.

A couple of ways of being intentional

- 1) Mark Lent on your calendar in some way. Mark February 17 as Ash Wednesday. Mark April 3 as the last day of Lent. Shade all of the days in purple so you know that you are still in Lent. On three or four (or more) days scattered through this season, write on your calendar "how am I doing on my Lenten journey?".
- 2) Pick one of pillars of a holy Lent to work on. While you can certainly work on all four, it is also helpful to really focus on one of them. The four pillars are 1) self-examination and repentance; 2) by prayer, fasting and self-denial; 3) reading and meditating on God's Holy Word; 4) self-sacrifice and service to others.

How do we work on those pillars? In this newsletter and throughout Lent, we will offer you suggestions on how to strengthen all four of them. Pick one or more of the suggestions to do through Lent. You can chose one suggestion to do all through the season, or you can change it up and do more than one. You will also receive in the mail before Ash Wednesday begins, a Lenten kit that will have various options to help you observe this holy Lent. Watch your mailbox around February 13-15, for this mailing!

The theme we are using during Lent is "walking the path of God." May as we intentionally take this journey, may God make us to know God's ways and may God teach us the path.

Blessings

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