

Newsletter Reflections for March

As I am writing this we are coming to the end of February which is considered by local weather men as the end of the winter season, although I remember plenty of March snows from my childhood. One weatherman recently quipped: "We are coming to the end of the winter that never was." Perhaps that is why I feel so out of sync with the beginning of Lent on March 1st. Lent always begins on Ash Wednesday but exactly what date that is varies from year to year. Our images of Lent are usually associated with remorse, penitence and fasting. Things that seem appropriate for the dreary days near the end of winter. But this February we have been blessed with beautiful days, warm days which have caused the spring flowers to burst forth. Our flowering shrubs and trees are either blooming or about to put on their usual spring display. But our liturgical calendar informs us we are entering that forty days that we are called to use to prepare for our journey to the cross. It is one of the quirks of Lent that the forty days skip over the Sundays. Even in the midst of our preparation for Holy Week and the cross, we pause to celebrate the resurrection on those Sundays. Church history tells us the Lenten period began as a time when converts to Christianity were prepared to enter into the community of faith. It was the culmination of a process which often took years to complete. Lent represented the final stage where they were admitted to the worship services although not allowed to partake of the Eucharist until the Easter Service. Easter is still often the time when confirmation classes end and members officially join the church. The question for us who have been members of the faith community for years—decades in some cases—is to consider what this time of preparation means to and for us. In many cases it seems to be either ignored or trivialized. Google can provide you with suggestions for activities—ranging from fasting, giving up a "bad" or "self-indulgent" habit to "picking up" a beneficial habit or performing a service or task for someone else. Although fasting was clearly a part of the early church's tradition for this period, it was done within the Biblical tradition that the fast was a visible indication of remorse and repentance, a recognition of the need for mercy and forgiveness. Just avoiding chocolate or a favorite TV program would not have been seen as a way to express repentance and a deep spiritual movement toward God. We do the disposition of ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday to observe the start of Lent. The ashes are used to draw the symbol of the cross with these words spoken: Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return (reflecting man's creation from "dirt" in Genesis 2:7). Perhaps because we don't like reminders of our mortality, Ash Wednesday services are often not well attended. But ashes have traditionally been used a sign of repentance and mourning. If we approach Lent as a period of self-examination; a time to consider how faithfully we are traveling on the path God illuminates for us through the life of Jesus, then this can be a time of great spiritual meaning and maturing. If we are truthful with ourselves, we can see that this journey offers us a time for personal remorse, reconciliation and the receiving of grace. Reflecting on God's activity in us and the world is another useful approach to this time of preparation. Approaching Lent this way can relieve us of many burdens we carry—guilt, for we recognize we are forgiven; fear because we trust more fully in God's promises; envy for we are blessed and beloved children of God, etc.

Lent is truly not meant to be just something we go through to get to Easter—it is meant to be a blessing which draws us closer to the One who always desires to be in relationship with us.

Pastor Libby

Ashes

Poems by Ann Weems in Kneeling in Jerusalem

Two nights ago I knelt and took ashes from the fireplace.
It was some time before I saw evidence of the smudge of ash upon my face.
I washed it quickly away.

Last night I knelt and took the bread and dipped it in the cup,
And then I felt the cool smooth finger of ash upon my forehead,
Ashes from last year's palms saved for this holy time.
I wondered if there might still be some remnant of Hosanna!
Lingering in the ashes.

All evening I wore the ash, that holy ash,
And when others saw the smudge, I wondered if they were inclined
To wipe it clean or to lean closer in the hope of hearing
Some soft Hosanna! burning still in ash or heart...

Lent

Lent is a time to take the time
To let the power of our faith story take hold of us,
A time to let the events get up and walk around in us,
A time to intensify our living unto Christ,
A time to hover over the thoughts of our hearts,
A time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem
Or to walk along the sea and listen to His word,
A time to touch His robe and feel the healing surge through us,
A time to ponder and a time to wonder...
Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!