

March 2018 Pastor's Page

How is your Lenten journey? We're not quite to the midway point in the season of Lent, so perhaps it's a good time to pull over and check the map or GPS for progress. Often we approach Ash Wednesday with the best intentions of joining Jesus on his journey to the Cross: we've decided on a bad habit or a tempting food to give up, or a new discipline that can help us grow in our spiritual faith. But sometimes as the midwinter days drift slowly along, we find ourselves slipping—not on ice or packed snow, but away from our chosen Lenten discipline. I pray that you have kept your grip so far, able to stay your course, and in doing so have found a stronger connection or relationship to the journey of our Savior.

One of the blessings that Lent brings is a chance to gather halfway through our busy week to sing, pray, and share in some additional thoughts on the scriptures from our Journey of Stones sermon series. These Wednesday evening Lenten services will continue through March in the chapel at 6:00pm (unless we outgrow the space). I hope you will invite a friend or neighbor and come as you are to get a little extra fuel in your spiritual tank during the week!

Another blessing of the Lenten season comes from knowing that, just as Minnesota's seemingly permanent winters DO eventually come to an end, Lent is a period of time that will joyously culminate in Easter—that day when the Christian Church throughout the world celebrates together the victory Christ won as he rose from the dead. Soon and very soon (April 1st – no foolin'!) we too will gather joyously to celebrate because his Easter resurrection is ours!

Recently I uncovered a challenging quote I had saved several years ago from Mohandas Gandhi, who remarked, *"I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."* Even within the body of Christian believers some of us may find ourselves agreeing with this statement because human beings can often disappoint us. When someone points to the misdeeds of a professed Christian as a reason not to embrace the faith, we may tell them to look at Jesus instead. Or in the case of his letter to the Philippians, Paul calls his audience to look at him and his followers—and imitate them.

Philippians 3:17 says, *"Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us."* Now that sounds like a risky proposition if we fast-forward to some of the high-profile religious leaders who have fallen so mightily in recent decades! I know I'm certainly not ready to put myself on that kind of pastoral pedestal—I'm only human and still in need of guidance as much as the next person!?!

The challenge is nonetheless laid down. Paul calls us to imitate his faith and practices, and luckily for us he was a prolific New Testament writer. Now we might be tempted to dismiss Paul as some kind of ego-maniac for putting himself out there as one to be imitated, but he isn't actually making a claim to be perfect. Indeed, he can't deny his checkered past under the name Saul, when he was a great persecutor of Christians. He had done well for himself in that Roman-dominated culture, but by the time of his writing he says, *"Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Philippians 3:7-8).

What may have sounded like vanity on Paul's part is actually a challenge for his audience—both then and now—to imitate him in the single-minded pursuit of sharing in Christ's suffering, and in knowing the power of Christ's resurrection (see Philippians 3:10-11). Paul is not so much holding himself up as the perfect example, but is speaking from the experience of devoting his whole life to following the one who is the true, ultimate example of humility and self-sacrificial service: Christ Jesus our Lord.

As we continue on this Lenten journey, let us find moments to pause and draw inspiration from Paul's journey—and through it may we find ourselves drawn into his teacher's journey. See you along the way!

In Christ's service,
Rev. Cory Germain