

The Reverend's Ruminations

As we “March” onward toward spring, I hope that you made productive use of the extra day you were given in February this “leap year”!?! Did you give it a second thought? I’m not sure I even noticed!

As we lean *hope*-fully toward spring, we find ourselves in the midst of forty solemn days known in the church as Lent (which began on February 26th with Ash Wednesday and will continue to Easter, not counting Sundays). Last month I made mention of the fact that many Christians choose to give up the comfort of a favorite food, drink, or habit in order to gain a better understanding of our Savior’s suffering and temptation in the wilderness. But what else do you know about Lent? I came across a helpful article by Sarah Phillips on crosswalk.com, and thought I’d highlight a few of the concepts she shared:

“...unlike the childlike joy associated with the season of Advent, with its eager anticipation of the precious baby Jesus, Lent is an intensely penitential time as we examine our sinful natures and return to the God we have, through our own rebelliousness, hurt time and again. Lent is also an opportunity to contemplate what our Lord really did for us on the Cross – and it wasn't pretty. But ultimately, the purpose of Lent does not stop at sadness and despair – it points us to the hope of the Resurrection and the day when every tear will be dried” (Revelation 21:3). As Sarah points out, Lent doesn’t elicit the excitement that Advent does, but maybe the commercialization of Christmas has taken so much Christ out of *Christ*-mas that we’ve lost sight of Advent’s significance in our church lives!?!

So how do we “do” Lent? One of the most important aspects of Lent is confession – although not in the foreboding sense that you may be picturing from some old movie. As Ms. Phillips says, *“... [the forty days of Lent] are set aside to really examine areas of recurring sin in our lives that prevent us from being conformed to God's Will. Keep in mind the idea here is not to be overly scrupulous or to deceive yourself into thinking you can earn heaven through your own goodness. The goal is to honestly examine your life in light of God's Word and to make a commitment to change in any areas you have not submitted to the Lord.”* None of us have yet managed to fully live up to Christ’s example, so just be honest as you examine your Christian walk, and then look for ways to make improvements – incremental as they may be.

A good way to start your own examination of conscience is by praying the words of Psalm 139:23-24: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* After opening yourself to God with these words, then hold up your life to the Ten Commandments. Confess to God, to me as your pastor, or to an accountability partner (James 5:16) the ways you may have sinned against God. But don’t stop there, or you may really feel stuck. Thank God for the forgiveness offered through Christ’s sacrifice, and then ask God for the grace to change. You may be pleasantly surprised where and when God chooses to respond in your life.

I pray that you will approach Lent with a renewed sense of purpose this year, and find yourself connecting more deeply to our Savior’s temptation and sacrifice in the coming weeks. Please remember to join us each Wednesday at 6:00 pm in the chapel for our 30-minute mid-week Lenten services. New this year are professionally published daily Lenten devotionals from the resource office of our United Church of Christ. Those of you familiar with their Advent devotional will enjoy the variety of images offered by a broad spectrum of contributing writers. I hope that you will find it to be a helpful guide as you journey with Jesus toward the cross – and his glorious resurrection on Easter morn.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Cory Germain