

“LENT'S MOTIVE”

Ash Wednesday, 18 February 2015

Saint Mary's Church

(The Rev'd Robert W. Anthony)

“Lent arrives and I'm looking for direction.

**My fragmented life and self-concern pull at my intentions,
unsettling my faith, diluting my commitment.**

This season I want to change.

Where do I begin?

**I look to Jesus, how he lived and loved, what he said, what he did
among his friends and followers called 'THE WAY'.**

**This Lent will be different as I examine myself--
my life-style, my thoughts, my habits, my hopes, my faith and my Lord.
Guide me, Father, in the way of Lent and Life.”**

-a Spiritual Director

As much as we might think otherwise, Lent is not about us as much as it is about Jesus. Generally, we tend to think more of ourselves in Lent—fasting, spiritual disciplines, meditation, prayer and study, reflecting on the status of our daily lives and to seek improvement.

For me the only valid purpose for Lent in anybody's life is to bring one closer to Jesus who is the “joy of man's desiring.” The goal of Lent is growth, repentance, renewal in the joy and the life of Jesus.

Ash Wednesday, however, focuses on the issue of **FASTING**, a one-day crash course on how to fast, and what to do or not to do. And you couldn't ask for a clearer, more transparent teaching on fasting than in our first Lesson this morning from Isaiah (58)

"Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: *Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God. 'Why (God) do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you (God) do not notice?' (to the people) 'Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such a fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.'*"

(Compare this passage with MATTHEW 25:31-46)

Here is a **Lenten Resolution** passed on to us by one of our favorite authors: "ANONYMOUS":

"Let me be a little kinder, Let me be a little blinder to the faults of those about me; Let me praise a little more; Let me be, when I am weary, just a little more cheery; Let me serve a little better those that I am striving for. Let me be a little braver when temptation bids me waver; Let me strive a little harder to be all that I should be; Let me be a little meeker with the brother that is weaker; Let me think more of my neighbor and a little less of me." -Author Unknown

ROBERT HERRICK, a mystical poet and Anglican divine worth noting from the 16th century, echoes Isaiah and others as to the best kind of fasting as a spiritual discipline. In this poem he sounds both urgent and a bit gnarly:

“Is this a fast, to keep The larder leane? And cleane from fat of veales, and sheep?
 Is it to quit the dish of flesh, yet still to fill the platter high with fish?
 Is it to fast an houre Or rag'd to go, Or show A down-cast look, and sowre?
 No: 'tis a fast, to dole Thy sheaf of wheat, And meat, Unto the hungry soule.
 It is to fast from strife, From old debate And hate; To circumcise thy life.
 To shew a heart grief-rent; To starve thy sin, Not bin;
 and that's to keep thy Lent.”

Our former Presiding Bishop Arthur Lichtenberger left us with this sound Lenten advice:

“FAST from criticism and FEAST on praise.
 FAST from self-pity and FEAST on joy.
 FAST from ill-temper and FEAST on contentment.
 FAST from resentment and FEAST on peace.
 FAST from jealousy and FEAST on love.
 FAST from pride and FEAST on service.
 FAST from fear and FEAST on humility.
 FAST from selfishness and FEAST on faith.”

A renowned contemporary Orthodox priest and author, Alexander Schmemmann in his book:

“*GREAT LENT: JOURNEY TO PASCHA*”: (p. 28)

“Lent is the liberation of our enslavement to sin, from the prison of this world...the triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore the first break through this fortress of sin is FORGIVENESS: the return to unity, solidarity, love.” As we enter the season of Lent, may we embark upon this same return in our personal and corporate journeys to Easter.