



The Season of Lent

The season of Lent has not been well observed in much of evangelical Christianity, largely because it was associated with "high church" liturgical worship that some churches were eager to reject. However, much of the background of evangelical Christianity, for example the heritage of John Wesley, was very "high church." Many of the churches that had originally rejected more formal and deliberate liturgy are now recovering aspects of a larger Christian tradition as a means to refocus on spirituality in a culture that is increasingly secular.

Originating in the fourth century of the church, the season of Lent spans 40 weekdays beginning on Ash Wednesday and climaxing during Holy Week with Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), Good Friday, and concluding Saturday before Easter. Originally, Lent was the time of preparation for those who were to be baptized, a time of concentrated study and prayer before their baptism at the Easter Vigil, the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord early on Easter Sunday. But since these new members were to be received into a living community of Faith, the entire community was called to preparation. Also, this was the time when those who had been separated from the Church would prepare to rejoin the community.

Today, Lent is marked by a time of prayer and preparation to celebrate Easter. Since Sundays celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the six Sundays that occur during Lent are not counted as part of the 40 days of Lent, and are referred to as the Sundays in Lent. The number 40 is connected with many biblical events, but especially with the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness preparing for His ministry by facing the temptations that could lead him to abandon his mission and calling. Christians today use this period of time for introspection, self examination, and repentance. This season of the year is equal only to the Season of Advent in importance in the Christian year, and is part of the second major grouping of Christian festivals and sacred time that includes Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost.

Lent has traditionally been marked by penitential prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Some churches today still observe a rigid schedule of fasting on certain days during Lent, especially the giving up of meat, alcohol, sweets, and other types of food. Other traditions do not place as great an emphasis on fasting, but focus on charitable deeds, especially helping those in physical need with food and clothing, or simply the giving of money to charities. Most Christian churches that observe Lent at all focus on it as a time of prayer,



LENTEN CALENDAR

Take note of the following special events currently scheduled as part of our Lenten season:

- Shrove Tuesday pancake supper at Hope
- Ash Wednesday services at Sedgewick United & Hope, Forestburg
- "Together in Christ" study series (see article in the newsletter for more information)
- Good Friday service will take place in Forestburg (more information to follow).

Dates and starting times for each of these events are shown in the calendar included with this newsletter.

especially penance, repenting for failures and sin as a way to focus on the need for God's grace. It is really a preparation to celebrate God's marvellous redemption at Easter, and the resurrected life that we live, and hope for, as Christians.

Mardi Gras or Carnival

Carnival, which comes from a Latin phrase meaning "removal of meat," is the three day period preceding



Together in Christ

Lutherans and Catholics Commemorating the Reformation

"Together in Christ" is a five-part parish study which covers the 500-year arc of history from the 16th Century Reformation until now. The study is designed to facilitate conversation, study and prayer. The study touches on some of the events and theological questions surrounding the Reformation and the advancements in reconciliation which have occurred over the past 50 years.

We will be offering this study over five consecutive Wednesday evening during the Lenten season beginning on March 8.

Since an internet connection is required we will be holding the study group at Pastor Rick's house.

Space is limited so be sure to reserve your spot!

the beginning of Lent, the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday immediately before Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of the Lenten Season (some traditions count Carnival as the entire period of time between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday). The three days before Ash Wednesday are also known as Shrovetide ("shrove" is an Old English word meaning "to repent"). The Tuesday just before Ash Wednesday is called Shrove Tuesday, or is more popularly known by the French term Mardi Gras, meaning "Fat Tuesday," contrasting to the fasting during Lent. The entire three day period has now come to be known in many areas as Mardi Gras.

Carnival or Mardi Gras is usually a period of celebration, originally a festival before the fasting during the season of Lent. Now it is celebrated in many places with parades, costumes, dancing, and music. Many Christians' discomfort with Lent originates with a

distaste for Mardi Gras. In some cultures, especially the Portuguese culture of Brazil, the French culture of Louisiana, and some of the Caribbean cultures such as Trinidad, it has tended to take on the excesses of wild and drunken revelry. There has been some attempt in recent years to change this aspect of the season, such as using Brazilian Carnival parades to focus on national and cultural history. Many churches now observe Mardi Gras with a church pancake breakfast or other church meal, eating together as a community before the symbolic fasting of Lent begins.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday, the seventh Wednesday before Easter Sunday, is the first day of the Season of Lent. Its name comes from the ancient practice of placing ashes on worshippers' heads or foreheads as a sign of humility before God, a symbol of mourning and sorrow at the death that sin brings into the world. It not only prefigures the mourning at the death of Jesus, but also places the worshipper in a position to realize the consequences of sin. Ash Wednesday is a somber day of reflection on what needs to change in our lives if we are to be fully Christian.

In the early church, ashes were not offered to everyone but were only used to mark the forehead of worshippers who had made public confession of sin and sought to be restored to the fellowship of the community at the Easter celebration. However, over the years others began to show their humility and identification with the penitents by asking that they, too, be marked as sinners. Finally, the imposition of ashes was extended to the whole congregation in services similar to those that are now observed in many Christian churches on Ash Wednesday. Ashes became symbolic of that attitude of penitence reflected in the Lord's prayer: "forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us" (Luke 11:4, NRSV).

Colors and Symbols of Lent

The color used in the sanctuary for most of Lent is purple, red violet, or dark violet. These colors symbolize both the pain and suffering leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus as well as the suffering of humanity and the world under sin. But purple is also the color of royalty, and so anticipates through the suffering and death of Jesus the coming resurrection and hope of newness



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that will be celebrated in the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Some church traditions use grey for Ash Wednesday or for the entire season of Lent, or for special days of fasting and prayer. Gray is the color of ashes, and therefore a biblical symbol of mourning and repentance. The decorations for the sanctuary during Lent should reflect this mood of penitence and reflection. Some Anglican churches use unbleached muslin, which can range from white to beige, with accents in red or black for Lent to symbolize this same spirit of penitence. Some churches avoid the use of any flowers in the sanctuary during Lent, using various dried arrangements. This can be especially effective if a flowering cross is used for Easter. Other churches use arrangements of rocks or symbols associated with the Gospel readings for the six Sundays in Lent.

In Roman Catholic and Anglican traditions, as well as some Protestant traditions, the fourth Sunday of Lent is known as Laetere Sunday (lay-TAH-ray, a Latin imperative meaning "rejoice!"). In the midst of the more somber tone of penitence during Lent, this Sunday anticipates the resurrection of Jesus, a day of hope in light of the coming Easter Sunday. As such, it parallels the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete Sunday (gow-DAY-tey), with the theme of celebration for the immanent work of God in the world. In traditions that observe Laetere Sunday, Rose is used as a sanctuary color for that Sunday, a lightening of the purple of Advent with the white of celebration.

Some church traditions change the sanctuary colors to red for Maundy Thursday, a symbol of the disciples and through them the community of the church. Since Eucharist or communion is often observed on Maundy Thursday in the context of Passover, the emphasis is on the gathered community in the presence of Jesus the Christ.

Traditionally, the sanctuary colors of Good Friday and Holy Saturday are black, the only days of the Church Year that black is used. It symbolizes the darkness brought into the world by sin. It also symbolizes death, not only the death of Jesus but the death of the whole world under the burden of sin. In this sense, it also represents the hopelessness and the endings that come as human beings try to make their own way in the world without God. Black is always replaced by white before sunrise of Easter Sunday.

The Journey of Lent

There are many ways for a congregation to mark the journey of Lent. Of course, beginning with a service of worship for Ash Wednesday is always appropriate. During Lent, one of the most effective visual reminders

of the season that can be expanded in many variations is to use a rough wooden cross as a focal point in the sanctuary. The type of cross and how it is constructed will depend on exactly how it will be used. The cross is usually erected in the Sanctuary on Ash Wednesday as a visible symbol of the beginning of Lent. It is usually draped in black on Good Friday. The same cross can also become a part of the congregation's Easter celebration as it is then draped in white or gold, or covered with flowers. Responsive readings associated with various symbols of Lent placed on the cross each Sunday in Lent can provide a structure for penitential prayers during this season.

Another effective way to make use of the cross is to use it as a Prayer Cross during Lent. A hammer, square nails, and small pieces of paper are made available near the cross. At a designated time of prayer during the Sundays in Lent, or beginning with Ash Wednesday, people are invited to write their prayer requests on the paper, and then nail them to the cross. The quiet time of prayer with only the sounds of the hammer striking the nails can be a moving time for reflection on the meaning of Lent, and a powerful call to prayer. The prayer requests can be removed and burned as part of a Tenebrae or Stations of the Cross service during Holy Week to symbolize releasing the needs to God.

Some churches have a special time of prayer or meditation one night of each week during Lent. Often Catholic and high church traditions pray the Stations of the Cross. Some Protestant churches have a special



Annual meetings are scheduled as follows:

- Hope - Feb. 26 (worship start times are changed for this day only. Check the calendar for correct start times.)
- St. John's - Feb 12 immediately following service
- Trinity - March 5 immediately following service

series of weekly Bible studies followed by a time of meditation and prayer. Often, in both Catholic and Protestant traditions, the prayer time is followed by a simple meal of soup and bread to symbolize the penitence of the Season.

Reflections on Lent

We enjoy celebrating Palm Sunday. The children get to make paper palm branches and for many it is one of the few times they get to take an active role in "big church." We wave the palm branches and celebrate. And we all love Easter Sunday! It is a happy time, with flowers, new clothes, and the expectation of Spring in the air.

Yet there is something significant missing if we only concentrate on celebration for these two Sundays. It is too easy and promotes much too cheap a grace to focus only on the high points of Palm Sunday and Easter without walking with Jesus through the gathering shadows of Maundy Thursday and the darkness of Good Friday. For us, that journey begins on Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. Lent is a way to recall a larger story than just celebration. It is a way to face the reality of the consequences of sin and the terrible toll it takes on the world. Lent calls us to examine our own lives with the prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me (Psa 139:23-24).

The journey through Lent is a way to places ourselves before God humbled, bringing in our hands no price whereby we can ourselves purchase our salvation. It is a way to confess our total inadequacy before God, to strip ourselves bare of all pretenses to righteousness, to come before God in dust and ashes. It is a way to empty ourselves of our false pride, of our rationalizations that prevent us from seeing ourselves as needy creatures, of our external piety that blinds us to the beam in our own eyes.

Through prayer that gives up self, we seek to open ourselves up before God, and to hear anew the call "Come unto me!" We seek to recognize and respond afresh to God's presence in our lives and in our world. We seek to place our needs, our fears, our failures, our hopes, our very lives in God's hands, again. And we seek by abandoning ourselves in Jesus' death to recognize again who God is, to allow His transforming grace to work in us once more, and to come to worship Him on Easter Sunday with a fresh victory and hope that goes beyond the new clothes, the Spring flowers, the happy music.

Yet, that celebration begins in ashes. And it journeys though darkness. It is a spiritual pilgrimage that I am

convinced we must all make, one way or the other, for genuine spiritual renewal to come.

I have heard the passage in 2 Chronicles 7:14 quoted a lot: ". . .if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." This usually is quoted in the context of wanting revival or renewal in the church. The prayer is usually interpreted as intercessory prayer for others, since we too easily assume that any problem lies with someone else. Yet a careful reading of the passage will reveal that the prayer that is called for here is not intercessory prayer for others; it is penitential prayer for the faith community, for us. It is not to call for others to repent; it is a call for us, God's people, to repent. It is our land that needs healed, it is our wicked ways from which we need to turn, we are the ones who need to seek God's face.

Perhaps during the Lenten season we should stop praying for others as if we were virtuous enough to do so. Perhaps we should take off our righteous robes just long enough during these 40 days to put ashes on our own heads, to come before God with a new humility that is willing to confess, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." Maybe we should be willing to prostrate ourselves before God and plead, "Lord, in my hand no price I bring; simply to the cross I cling." That might put us in a position to hear God in ways that we have not heard Him in a long time. And it may be the beginning of that healing for which we have so longed.

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Faith Country Shared Ministry

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
~ February 2017 ~						
5 10:30 Trinity Communion Service	6	7	8	9 7:30 Animate Study Series - Salvation @ St. John's, Sedgewick	10	11
					12 St. John's Annual Meeting 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Eucharist Service	13 14 7:00 Big Knife Villa Service
					15 16 7:00 Big Knife Villa Service	17 18
					19 Transfiguration Sunday (Trinity) 10:30 Trinity Song Service	20 21 10:30 Galahad Pastoral Care
					22	23 24 25
					26 Transfiguration Sunday (Hope & St. John's) 9:15 St. John's Morning Prayer 11:15 Hope Worship Service & AGM - Note time change for this service only.	27 28 Notes: 4:30 Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper - Hope, Forestburg



Faith Country Shared Ministry

~ March 2017 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 Ash Wednesday 7:30 Ash Wednesday Service - Hope, Forestburg 7:30 Ash Wednesday Service - Sedgewick United Church	2 10:00 Galahad Care Center Service 7:30 Animate Study Series - Cross @ Hope	3	4
5 Trinity Annual Meeting 10:30 Trinity Communion Service	6	7	8 7:30 Together In Christ - Ecumenical Study Session @ Pr. Rick's house	9	10	11
				12 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Eucharist Service	13 14	15 7:30 Together In Christ - Ecumenical Study Session @ Pr. Rick's house
				16 7:30 Animate Study Series - Bible @ St. John's, Sedgewick	17	18
					19 10:30 Trinity Song Service	20 21
					22 7:00 Big Knife Villa Service 7:30 Together In Christ - Ecumenical Study Session @ Pr. Rick's house	23 24
						25
						26 Richard Conrad to lead morning prayer at St. John's - Special Message: "Second Time Around" 9:15 Hope Worship Service 11:15 St. John's Morning Prayer
					27 1:30 Hope Worship Comm.	28 29 7:30 Together In Christ - Ecumenical Study Session @ Pr. Rick's house
						30 31 Notes: